BOND AND FREE.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "CASTE,"

ETC., ETC.

"But ill for him who, bettering not with time,
Corrupts the strength of heaven-descended Will,
And ever weaker grows through acted crime."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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CHAPTER I.

> "Ich weiss nicht was mich hier gefällt
> In dieser enger kleiner Welt
> Mit holder Zauberhand mich hält."

> "I could almost believe that she loves me!
> She sighs so oft, and she speaks so low;
> And her hand, when I take it in my hand,
> Seems so softly reluctant to go!"

MR. NARPENTH'S carriage drew up early one morning at the gate of the cabbage-ground, before the cottage in which Wilfred lodged.

It was a fine morning, late in October; it happened that Wilfred was standing

in the narrow path of this same cabbage-ground—admiring the glistening, dew-laden gossamer webs, which had formed a silver net-work over the homely vegetables—when Mr. Narpenth's footman swung open the gate and came up the path, a note in his hand.

Wilfred took the note from him; as he did so, he saw that Miss Narpenth leant forward in the carriage and bowed. He could do no less than approach her to pay his respects.

There was something soft and conciliating in Miss Narpenth's manner this morning which made her peculiarly attractive. Wilfred leant awhile on the carriage-door talking to her—looking remarkably handsome as he stood bare-headed in the bright morning sunshine. They had conversed for some minutes before he became aware that Mrs. Lister was in the carriage, reclining in the

far corner. Bowing to her, and apologizing for not having seen her sooner, he said something about being dazzled by the bright light —involuntarily glancing at Eleanour's brilliant face as he did so. When Mrs. Lister had acknowledged his greeting, and listened to his apology, she said—

"The horses are fresh, Miss Narpenth. I observe that the coachman can hardly manage to make them stand quiet. Had we not better proceed?"

The expression of her eyes as she averted them from Wilfred's did not harmonize with the cold preciseness with which she spoke; but Wilfred and Eleanour were too much occupied with each other to notice this.

"Well! we must go," Eleanour said, "and you will come this evening. By-the-bye, as I have seen you, you can give me back my note."

She saw it in his hand, and extended hers to take it; but a perverse impulse made him put the hand that held it behind him, and shake his head.

"Excuse me! This note is no longer yours, but mine, and I choose to keep it."

"Not if I *beg* you to return it to me." The white and jewelled hand was still extended in the sunshine, and the face had some earnestness in it.

"Are you serious in wishing to have it back?"

Wilfred, shading his eyes with his hand, lifted a somewhat audaciously keen glance to the face above him, as he spoke.

Eleanour drew back quickly—

"It is no great matter!" she said—"good-bye, till this evening." Her face was half averted as her hand was held out again; this time in leave-taking.

Almost before their hands had parted,

the carriage dashed off. Mrs. Lister uttered a low cry and stretched before Miss Narpenth, to look back along the road.

"He stood so close, I fancied the wheel might have knocked him down or gone over his feet; but he is safe," she said to Eleanour, as she recomposed herself in her corner, with a slight shudder.

Eleanour smiled inappropriately, made some inappropriate remark; then both the occupants of the carriage sank into profoundly meditative silence.

Wilfred felt himself unsettled for in-door work that day, and so set out for a long walk. It was while resting by the wayside that he opened Miss Narpenth's note; he had thrust it into his breast-pocket, with an air of mock gallantry, as she drove off.

"I begin without a beginning," she wrote, "because I do not know how to please

myself with a beginning: it does not much matter, for I fear this note will come back to me, never having said anything to you. I am prepared to find that you have left Thorndon, and that nobody knows where you are gone." ('That is what I ought to have done, probably,' thought Wilfred.) "It is now a long time since we last saw you, and you have a habit of disappearing and reappearing unexpectedly, we know: though I say I am prepared to find that you are gone, I shall be—I do not know exactly what—if I find such is really the case.

"You seem to have no consideration for the burdensomeness of the gratitude we bear towards my 'deliverer from a watery grave,' or surely you would give us more opportunity of freeing ourselves from it; but it is no use to write reproaches which, if you merit them in this instance, will

never reach you. The whole object of this note is to beg you, if you are still living like a Prince in disguise at your cottage, to come and dine with us this evening. If you are at the cottage and refuse to come, I shall think—well, I do not know what I shall think. Papa desired me to write and ask you to come. Is it 'improper' of me not to have written an invitation more *en règle?* If so, forgive me this and all other offences."

The question with which this note concluded led Wilfred to wonder how it was that Miss Narpenth—gifted as she was and much as he admired her—did not inspire him with that feeling of timidity, almost awe, with which, according to his theory, true women should have it in their power to inspire men.

He could not imagine himself laughing and jesting — so soon feeling on intimate and

familiar terms as he did with Eleanour Narpenth—with—well, if his ideal woman must have a name, that name must be—Felicia. Then he thought a good deal of Felicia—of how, though she was but a child when he saw her first, he had then conceived a reverent affection for her; which had not since suffered loss or change.

"She must be quite a woman now," he said, "and surely the woman will not be less an object of loving reverence than was the child. And yet, it may be, that my boyish shyness, my want of familiarity with the ways and wiles of a lovely, sweet-natured child, had something to do with my peculiar feeling towards Felicia. If I met her now I might regard her with different eyes; yet I cannot believe that I should ever regard her with other than reverent eyes."

He mused by the wayside so long that

he had to walk fast in order to reach the cottage in time to dress for dinner.

Mrs. Lister appeared at the table this evening. She was placed opposite Wilfred; he found that his eyes fixed themselves upon her face oftener, and rested there longer, than was quite consistent with politeness; but she did not appear to be conscious of his scrutiny, and hers was a face to which any observant eyes would return again and again.

Her finely-chiselled features looked as if they had been fretted sharp by suffering; the full, red-lipped mouth appeared much too fresh and young to have such weary lines about it; the eyes much too youthfully brilliant to shine in such deep and dark hollows. The ordinary expression of her face was of something between haughty resistance and humble endurance: to which it inclined most and oftenest it was im-

possible to say; as impossible as to decide what her age might be—what marks had been set upon her by sorrow, and what by time.

Mrs. Lister was treated with great deference and little cordiality by Mr. Narpenth; his daughter's manner to her *dame de compagnie* was not easy to understand. Sometimes it was caressingly familiar—sometimes cold and repelling; but its capricious changes seemed very little to affect the object of them.

Early in the evening Mrs. Lister and Mr. Narpenth sat down to a chess-table which stood ready near the fire, as if it were in constant use.

Wilfred, having begged for music, was taken by Eleanour into a smaller and very pretty room opening out of the drawing-room.

"Tell me what to play. What style of

music do you prefer?" Eleanour questioned, as Wilfred opened the piano and arranged the lights; while she turned over the contents of a folio.

"I am rather ignorant concerning both ancient and modern composers—I may say very ignorant. Suppose you give me a lesson: let me hear several different styles of music—play from old and new masters—good and bad compositions—try my powers of discrimination."

"You set me a task which makes it fortunate that we begin early in the evening," Eleanour answered, smiling; pointing to a luxuriously easy chair near the piano, she added—"Sit there, if you please; do not trouble to try and turn over the leaves and I will endeavour to do as you wish."

She began with a prelude and fugue of Sebastien Bach's; one of his most scientific and least passionate compositions.

"How do you like that?" she asked, turning towards Wilfred, when her skilful fingers had drawn out link after link of its intricate harmonies.

"It does not please me; at all events, not on a first hearing, because it does not touch or move me. In listening to it, I feel as if I were watching its elaboration by a great master of art who was just then complacently playing with science to prove his mastery of it, instead of allowing himself to be carried out of himself, and swept away by the power of his inspiration. Is this composer's music all of this kind?"

For answer, Eleanour played two short Figurirter Chorals—"Das alte Jahr vergangen ist," also "Wer nur den lieben Gott lässt walten;" and a "Fantasie Pathetique."

"Those are, in different ways, wonderfully soul-stirring—the first seemed to me a despairing wail; the voice of despair more

abject than passionate: the second is a noble profession of faith, dashed with melancholy, as even the *faith* of a great and thoughtful man often must be in these days: the last has a passionate self-assertion, and a pathetic abandonment, that thrilled through me. Still, am I right if I set this master down as one of those whose genius is apt to be fettered by too much love of science, and only now and then to break into free flights?"

"But the rare free flights must be the more gloriously free for the perfect mastery of science."

"I suppose so; but all power brings with it its peculiar dangers and temptations. Do you remember what Goethe said to Eckermann, after listening to some music, modern in his day, about the technical and mechanical improvement in their art having brought the newest composers into

a strange state? He considered that their productions were no longer music, because they went beyond the level of human feeling; so that one could give them no response from the mind and heart, but heard with the ears only."

"That is far more true of more modern composers—Thalberg, Lizt, and all their school—than of those of whom Goethe said it; and these, I suppose, acknowledge the truth that they go beyond the level of human feeling when they call their works 'Music of the Future.'"

"I did not exactly mean to apply Goethe's words to what you have just played, though, perhaps, that first thing is an error of the kind he, meant, and recalled his words to me; but we must not be tempted into discussion, or your fingers will not discourse half enough to satisfy me. You see that I

do not recognize the possibility of their growing tired. Ought I to do so?"

"I never tire of playing to myself, or to any one who is worth playing for and really wishes to hear me: but I detest playing for mere form's sake, when I am asked for mere form's sake. When I know that others want to hear me as little as I care to perform for them the whole thing becomes a farce, and justifies an opinion I once heard expressed, that music—young lady's music—is the bore of modern society."

Choosing next one of Mozart's masses, Eleanour played some of the finest passages from it—and then immediately after took up Rossini's 'Stabat Mater,' which she used in the same way.

"We heard all you have just played in the Cologne Cathedral, and you told me then what it was we listened to," Wilfred said. "You remember the young

monk with the splendid tenor voice, and the really spiritual face? The two compositions strike me now as they did then. The first, as genuine church-music, full of pious and tender feeling; here and there rising to solemnity and grandeur. Rossini's work, though beautiful in its way, seems to me like the expression of spurious, dramatized devotion. It is such music as (if one thought it allowable to represent on the stage so sacred a thing as religious worship) one would desire to hear at the Opera in a cathedral scene. The composer appears to me to be attitudinizing—to have to recompose himself to the necessary solemnity of mood continually; and, in spite of his utmost endeavours to throw a sacerdotal garb over it, the theatrical tinsel perpetually peeps out in passages of florid ornamention."

"I doubt if your taste is as unculti-

vated as you pretend, Mr. Mason! And your ear must be good to have recognized those fragments immediately."

"I did not recognize them immediately: my thoughts went wandering back, till they found themselves with you in the Cathedral at Cologne; but they were some time getting there, and took many things on their way."

Beethoven's "Moonlight Sonata" was the next thing Miss Narpenth played.

"I must hear that again and again," Wilfred said; "will you play it for me every time I come here, till I a little understand it?" Asking this, and looking into the softened light of Eleanour's eyes, Wilfred had no thought of anything but her beauty, and the beauty of the music; no feeling save of the most complete, though rather tumultuous enjoyment. The

music had made his heart beat and his pulses throb; but each throb and each heart-beat had its delicious pleasure.

"The beauty of the first part is as apparent as is the beauty of a lovely landscape or of a lovely face by clear moonlight," he continued; "but an under-tone of grief and mystery appears to run through it; just as ugly things may lurk in the blackness of moonlight shadows. In the after-parts the mystery seems to deepen and the grief to grow wild; struggling against the power of some oppressive spell. Pray remember to let me hear the 'Moonlight Sonata' often—it will haunt me till I can at least fancy that I comprehend it."

When Eleanour began playing Mendelssohn's "Lieder ohne Worte," Wilfred—leaning back in his chair, shading his eyes from the light, and between his screening fingers watching the player's expressive face—aban-

doned himself completely to uncriticizing, fascinated enjoyment.

"I have nothing to sày but 'go on,'" he observed, when Eleanour paused. She complied for a little while; then she laid aside the book — allowed her fingers to stray dreamingly among the notes, while the lids drooped dreamingly over eyes fixed upon the keys, as she pressed out a low sad strain. Suddenly she raised her head, seemed to rouse herself from her reverie, and dashed off into one of Chopin's wildest waltzes—playing louder and louder, faster and faster, till her fingers seemed to fly invisibly over the notes, crashing out the strangely-recurring chords more and more passionately. When it was impossible for her to increase the speed or power she broke off suddenly; putting her hand over her eyes, she said she was as giddy as if she had been waltzing.

Awakened from his luxurious ease, for the last few moments Wilfred had bent forward, watching those flying fingers with a contracted brow.

"Do you know the legend of 'Die Teufels-tänzerinn?'" he asked.

"No, I do not think I have ever heard it. What is it? Will you tell it to me?"

Eleanour leant back in her chair, still playing with the keys as she turned her eyes on Wilfred. Her colour was heightened; her breathing quickened; she spoke as if out of a dream—with a soft dreamy languor.

"If you will play a few bars of that wildest part very softly, I will try and tell you the legend. Still more softly—that will do! Now then! Once upon a time, there lived at a small Rhine village—which I will call Freigrün—a maiden of

the name of Lischen. This maiden led an ungodly life: she cared much for fêtes, and little for fasts; she frequented the village-dances more than the church-services; she inclined far more to the hearing of confessions of love than to the making confessions of sin; and she preferred giving absolution to a gay young dancer, to receiving it from a shaven old priest. This was bad, very bad, saith the chronicle.

"This gay maiden fell sick, and was told that she was sick unto death: she had danced late into a summer night, and then, to cool her fevered blood, had lingered out under the dew-laden lindens, beneath which gathered the heavy night-mists which creep up from the Rhine—whether she lingered alone or not the legend does not discover. Before the next nightfall the hand of sickness was heavy upon her.

"Lischen, being young, gay, pretty, and not portionless, loved life dearly, and shuddered much (grauet sich sehr) at the thought of the purgatory into which she must enter after that death from which the priest said that only the immediate and miraculous intercession of the Virgin could save her. The leech, whatever he might think, and whatever confidence he might have in his own simples, did not dare to contradict the priest. So from him the poor child obtained no consolation. Believing that, unless something desperate were done, her end was near, Lischen made three vows to the virgin: that if she recovered she would at once give half her portion to the Church; that her feet should never again move to the sound of music in the dance; that after a few years she would take the veil, and endow the sisterhood she joined

with the remainder of her fortune. From the time these vows were registered she improved rapidly—the priest kept at a distance, and the leech had fair play. Her feet were soon able to move lightly and nimbly again; but her heart was very heavy for thinking of her vows.

"One fête-day—the first after her recovery—having donned her best attire and carefully dressed her hair, Lischen climbed the hill that, overlooking the Rhine, frowns above the village of Freigrün; to try and escape from the sounds of music and mirth, grown hateful to her now that she was shut out from their enjoyment. Both her heart and her feet greatly desired the abjured dance.

"She reached a high terrace looking towards the river; there she sat down. She watched the sun set, all the gay colours fade from the opposite hills, and

everything grow cold and gray; but she had no pleasure in aught she saw—she did not love to hear the glad evening song of the birds—she did not love that any creatures should be gay and happy while she was sad. She shuddered at the thought of the dulness and gloom of her future life, almost as much as she had shuddered at the prospect of purgatory—and while she shuddered at the one she hardened her heart against belief in the other. If only that old priest were dead! She thought that no one else knew of her vows.

"As she sat there on that highest vine-terrace, evil spirits were behind her, and on both sides of her: the evening-wind joined the tempters, wafting up to her the sounds of music and laughter from the Tanz-platz below. There was an image of the Virgin near her; once she turned

towards it and tried to pray; but the wind blew stronger, the laughter sounded gayer, the music louder; to crown all, the players played her favourite waltz—the waltz to the intoxicating music of which she had danced with the young Baron, little thinking it would be for the last time.

"She turned away from the Virgin; she sat looking towards the village, and listening to the gay strains. Meanwhile, to the feet of the image there crept a poor Magdalen, who, raising clasped hands and streaming eyes, cried in the spirit, if not in the words, of Gretchen:—

"'Ach neige,
Du Schmerzenreiche,
Dein Antlitz gnädig meiner Noth!
Hilf! rette mich von Schmach und Tod!'

"The sounds of her lamentations reaching Lischen, that maiden felt as if she were in bad company: throwing a glance of scorn

over her shoulder towards the abject suppliant, she rose and went farther from her.

"'That will be the Röschen!' she muttered; she went her way without one pitying word or one tender thought for the penitent.

"Down she went; down towards the village and the Tanz-Platz, lower and lower, one terrace after the other—farther from her religion and its charities; nearer her world and its vanities. Now she has descended the hill-side; she has stolen stealthily near to the Tanz-Platz; she stands behind a linden and looks on.

"Ach! her rival, Clärchen, is Queen of the fête, and dances with—Ach, Gott!—with the young Herr Baron! Envy, hatred, love, and pride swell her breast, till it seems as if it would burst its silver-laced bodice—till the bodice is literally too narrow, and the silver lace flies. Little heeds Lis-

chen; her cheeks glow and her heart beats fast with consciousness of her own charms —for her glass tells her that she is fairer than ever. Did she choose to appear, she could in a few moments eclipse that Clärchen with whom the young Herr Baron smiles and whispers so gaily. She could eclipse her, and could reign in her stead.

"Lischen moves from behind the tree; she stands where the little coloured lights can shine upon her: they shine upon the thick plaits of her glossy hair; upon her brilliant eyes and red cheeks; upon the snow of the white bosom, in which the ambitious, envious, wicked little heart is beating tumultuously and firily. She is seen; her friends whisper and smile, and Clärchen passing, hanging on the Baron's arm, says, pointing to her:—

"'There is the poor Lischen—she can no longer dance!'

"The young man pauses before her—he bends his bold, bright glance upon the girl; she trembles beneath it. Was it indeed the young Baron, or the Evil One in his form? The bold glance seemed to burn on Lischen's brow and breast.

"'Is it so, Lischen?' he asks; 'has some rash vow fettered those lightest of feet? Have the priests got possession of the best dancer and the prettiest maiden in Freigrün?'

"She looks up at him; as glance meets glance the glow deepens on her cheeks. She has no need to speak. He drops Clärchen's hand, he holds out his arms to Lischen. Her heart now swelling with triumphant joy, all else forgotten, she flies into the arms of the tempter; she is whirled away into the circle of dancers.

"By-and-bye, one by one, the other couples drop off; it grows late—the weather looks

threatening—the wind is muttering menacingly in the trees; but the music sounds ever louder, faster, wilder, in more intoxicating strains; and Lischen, locked closer and closer in the young Baron's arms, is whirled round in swifter and swifter circles. His breath on her cheek and bosom becomes hot as fire; his grasp of her hand tightens till it is like a grasp of iron: as he holds her breast to breast, with suffocating pressure—she has no power to cry to him to stop, and on and on they go.

"The storm breaks—thunder growls, lightning flashes; the wind shrieks in the lindens, bows and threatens to break them; hail and rain drive fiercely across the Tanz-Platz. It is said that those two mad dancers nevertheless danced on and on, and that the wild waltz music sounded above all the noise of the storm. It is said—the legend grows more vague here—

that the maiden, long after she had been danced to death, was still whirled round and round in those cruel, clutching arms.

*   *   *   *   *

"In the morning the blackened corpses of a row of lindens lay across the Tanz-Platz; but those of the maiden and her partner were not found there. Clärchen declared that, after the dance with her, she had seen the young Herr Baron mount his horse and ride away towards the castle; but some doubt was thrown upon the truth of her statement. The old fiddlers swore that the waltz they played for the young Baron and the Clärchen was the last they played on that fatal night: but wine had then made them merry—they could hardly be expected to remember anything so exactly. The old priest, too, had helped to confuse their minds. Everybody agreed that all through

the night, in lulls of the storm, they had distinctly heard snatches of wild dance-music; and everybody believed, what the priest said, that the devil himself had danced off with the wicked, vow-breaking Lischen. On other points everybody disagreed.

"The young Herr Baron, after that night, was missing for some months; when he returned to Freigrün he listened very gravely to the tale that was told him, of how the devil had assumed his shape, and danced away with the Lischen.

"Perhaps a penitent, not the Röschen, who in years to come now and again stole stealthily to the feet of the Virgin, and cried to her in despair as abject as that of the Röschen had been, could have thrown some light upon the matter.

"The legend says that the grass would never grow again where the feet of the devil and his partner had worn or burnt it

off; that on stormy nights unearthly waltz-music is heard from beneath the blasted lindens that remain, and that a nun has been seen whirling round in the arms of a cavalier. The young people of the village chose a fresh Tanz-Platz, and many of the maidens, Clärchen among them, took the veil. To this day the fate of the Lischen, the Teufels-tanzerinn is often 'improved' in Freigrün."

"For the future these waltzes will always be telling me your very 'unheimlich' legend; which I half fancy they told to you while I played them," Eleanour said. Her eyes questioned him as she spoke; but he only smiled dubiously: she added, "How prosaic our age and country are! We always have to go to remote times or to distant lands for anything fit to be the subject of a romantic tale, legend, or ballad."

"I think that remark is hardly worthy of Miss Narpenth," Wilfred answered. "It is true that there may not be much poetry in the outward life of the present age; possibly your father's daily avocations would furnish no such matter for song or story as did those of a knight or baron of old; but it is this very fact that has driven us below the surface, into the heart of our common humanity; to bring to light such truth and such poetry as are truth and poetry for all ages and in all countries."

"But if, for instance, you were to deprive the little legend you have just told me of all local colouring — were to give it (if you will excuse the odious words) subjectivity instead of objectivity—to let the devil be within instead of without, and so on — you were half inclined to do this — you might make it a moral

little story of a nineteenth century maiden no doubt; but I think all the charm of it would vanish in the process."

"That would depend solely on the treatment; to give such a version of it as you suggest would demand far more knowledge—and far more experience of the inner life and of the working of the heart—than to tell the tale as I told it. But, this given to a sufficient degree, there is no reason why the story 'subjectively' treated should not be deeply interesting, and possessed of charms of its own. I do not say that I could make it deeply interesting, I only say that it might be made so."

"I should be inclined to say that you would make it so if anybody could, were it not for that of which I have told you before—a certain cold ideality about all you write concerning women, and a ten-

dency to generalize in speaking of them. I do not think you could draw a not good (I don't mean exactly bad) woman, and make her interesting. You think too well or too ill of us. But now we are upon this subject, I will ask you, don't you consider that the common 'subjectiveness' of our present literature gives it a wearisome sameness?"

"'Many books are a weariness to the flesh:' perhaps you are one of those who, from want of other occupation, or from that intellectual activity which is too often coupled with superficiality, read 'everything new.' I do not think that such people are fair judges of what they read."

"I plead guilty to the charge: the gratitude I feel to any author who changes listless curiosity into interest and admiration" (and here a brilliant glance pointed the compliment) "is in proportion to the

dissatisfaction and disappointment which are in general the chief results of my reading."

"I do not know whether the practice of indiscriminate reading, to which you confess, is most unfair to yourself or to the books you read. And is there not some degree of presumption implied when a person acts as if believing that his, or her, single mind were able to receive and contain the productions of so many minds of so many ages? Only think what jaded interests, confused intellects, and overburdened memories are brought to the perusal of a new book!"

"You are severe, but I do not justify my conduct. I generally read without any aim, without any desire to improve myself; merely striving to forget myself, and so to pass away hours that would otherwise be heavily weary."

"Perhaps it is because you are in this

one of many that, though this is an age of books, books have seldom, since very early times, had less influence upon the world at large: everybody reading everything—one thing contradicts another—the last thing read obliterates any impression that may have been made by the last but one."

"I often say that I will reform—take up some branch of study and fag at it; but I should never persevere unless I were tyrannized over by a strict master. My whole life is so aimless! Something within me for ever cries *cui bono?* when I think of throwing myself into any new pursuit. I sometimes hear people say, that the *having to do* things makes life dreadful slavery; I only wish there were any one thing that I *had* to do!"

"To an outside observer your life seems so rich in interests that there is something doubly melancholy in the tone of weary

discontent which appears, on your showing, to run through it."

Wilfred's manner was grave and reproving; but Miss Narpenth bowed to, instead of resenting, its reproof.

"It displeases you that I should not be placidly contented, serenely satisfied," she said with an air of gentle sarcasm; "but what can you know of the emptiness, the intense weariness of an idle woman's life? Neither of us can judge the other. Your life, Mr. Mason, is my ideal of a free, glorious, and happy existence; and yet, if I discern aright, you are not happy."

Her eyes looked full into his; there was something of soft wistfulness in them, and an earnestness that made them fill with tears.

"Indeed you say truly; neither of us can judge the other," Wilfred answered. "If you saw a little into the realities of my life

and position—you could know what thoughts and dreads are the companions of my solitude—it is probable that you would shrink from me with sharp recoil, as from possible contamination, drawing the skirts of your pride close round you."

Wilfred spoke with bitter feeling; resenting the words that had recalled him to himself; paling, as banished thoughts and half-stifled dreads thronged upon him with revived force; having gained fresh power to sting from their strong contrast with the luxurious ease and enjoyment in which he had just been sunk.

"Never! I should never shrink from you," Eleanour exclaimed. "Oh, Mr. Mason, I ask your pardon! I see that I have pained you. You know I did not mean to do so—forgive me. If my friendship is of any value to you, believe that it shall always be yours—believe this and forgive me."

She stretched out her hand as she spoke; her face bore witness to the genuineness of her distress.

"There is nothing to forgive," Wilfred answered, as he pressed her fingers. "On the contrary, I ought to beg of you to forgive my impetuosity; perhaps you have done me a service by unwittingly recalling what I ought never to have forgotten."

They both rose and turned from the piano, and, as they did so, they met Mrs. Lister's eyes. She sat where she had done when they left her; but working now and turned towards the entrance of the room in which they were. Mr. Narpenth was sleeping soundly in his chair near the chess-table, and the hands of the clock pointed to one.

"You should have warned us low late it was."

"You should have sent me away long ago," were the remarks Eleanour and Wilfred

addressed to Mrs. Lister, as they re-entered the drawing-room.

"How tired you must be! I am sincerely sorry to have kept you up so late," Wilfred added, noticing in how white a face those strange eyes glittered.

Mr. Narpenth was roused by the sound of voices, and apologized to everybody for having fallen asleep.

"By-the-bye, did you bring home the opera tickets, Papa?"—Miss Narpenth asked, just as Wilfred was leaving.

"Yes, my dear; I am glad you reminded me of them, for you must ask Mr. Mason to escort you and Mrs. Lister—I have an important engagement for to-morrow evening, which I had forgotten."

"Can you go with us, Mr. Mason, to the Opera to-morrow evening?"

Eleanour looked with soft entreaty, and her eyes gleamed with expectant pleasure.

"I shall be most happy to do so," he answered, and then longed to be able to recall the words.

"I told the housekeeper in the Square that three or four rooms would probably be wanted for to-morrow night. You must sleep at my house, Mr. Mason—it is impossible to get back to Thorndon. I should not wonder if we see something of the Captain, Eleanour; he said he should be in town about this time. Mr. Mason had better come here to a five o'clock dinner, and cup of coffee directly afterwards, to-morrow. You ought to leave Thorndon at six."

"Good nights" having been spoken, Wilfred walked quickly home, and addressed himself to sleep: to-morrow would bring more pleasure, for which he did not wish to spoil his appetite by reflection to-night. Already he was but half in tune for it—

a little self-questioning, a little consideration of his present position, and of his future prospects, would wholly destroy his power of enjoyment.

CHAPTER II.

> "Like a queen, she leant on her full white arm,
> With that regal, indolent air she had;
> So confident of her charm."

WILFRED rose next morning with much the same determination with which he had gone to bed—namely, to put off reflection, and enjoy the pleasure the day should offer: but a seriously-comic or comically-serious difficulty occurred to him—he did not possess a dress-coat, and could not go to the Opera without one.

What was to be done? Only one thing that he could see, and this he did—he

wrote a little note to Eleanour, telling her of his deficiency, and asking if Thorndon House could supply it, or if he must give up his proposed pleasure. On his way to a neighbouring village to purchase some gloves, he left the note at her house; when he returned to the cottage, he found a parcel, and an answering note awaiting him.

"Not from Eleanour," he commented, as he noticed the tremulous handwriting—"this is not Miss Narpenth's writing."

The note was signed "H. Lister," and contained only a few lines, to say that Miss Narpenth was glad to be able to furnish him with a coat which she thought would fit him; and that she proposed to send the carriage for him, should the afternoon prove wet, as it threatened to do.

Wilfred looked at the coat with some distaste; wondering to whom it belonged

—certainly not to Mr. Narpenth, who was shorter by a head, and broader by very many inches than Wilfred. As he looked it occurred to him to wonder who "the Captain" mentioned to Eleanour by her father might be! Then he glanced again at the note; this time he was struck not only by the extreme tremulousness of its characters, but also by a peculiarity in them, which suggested an effort on the part of the writer to disguise her usual hand. Something, he could not have explained what, induced him to put that note carefully away.

When Wilfred presented himself at Thorndon House both ladies would have ignored the coat transaction; but Wilfred himself was far too naïve to pass the matter by in silence.

As they took coffee in the drawing-room before starting, he expressed his

gratification at the goodness of the fit in a perfectly unembarrassed way; and, for their amusement, he related the history and adventures of the one dress-coat he had once possessed; touching lightly upon the circumstance that had led to his parting with it.

Lightly as he alluded to his neediness at that time, what he said revealed—to at least one of his listeners—much more than he intended of that he left unsaid.

As, just at that moment, he received of cup of coffee from Mrs. Lister's hand, he could not avoid observing how painfully that hand trembled; he thought it would have let the cup fall, and took it from her hastily. Miss Narpenth noticed both his look of kind interest and enquiry as he stooped towards Mrs. Lister, and the sudden flush that rose to that lady's white cheek.

Conscious that Eleanour's eyes were on her, and conscious of her own confusion, Mrs. Lister became more and more agitated; presently she rose quickly from her seat and left the room, saying something incoherent about its being time to fetch her shawl.

"Do you not think that Mrs. Lister is very handsome, Mr. Mason?" Eleanour asked. "With diamonds, and just a touch of rouge to make such a flush as rose to her face just now permanent, she would look magnificent in that black velvet."

"Rouge!"

"Don't appear so shocked. Don't you know that rouge is very commonly worn again now-a-days. You may look at me," she added, with a brilliant smile and a deepening colour—"I do not use it at present; but I do not pretend to say

that I never shall. Now, tell me; don't you think Mrs. Lister is very handsome?"

"I have never considered the matter. It is true, though you choose to look incredulous: her face is to me a painfully interesting one—it attracts my eyes constantly, against my will; sometimes she seems to shun observation so nervously that I feel ill at ease in her presence."

"She used not to be so nervous as she is now—her peculiarities grow upon her," Miss Narpenth said, meditatively, as she rose and approached the light to fasten a refractory bracelet.

It appeared that the bracelet would not be fastened. Wilfred offering his assistance, the ornament and the satin-smooth white arm were consigned to his hands. Eleanour stood just under the blaze of the chandelier; when Wilfred, having achieved his task, raised his head

and received his thanks from her eyes and her softly-smiling lips, he was literally dazzled by the brilliant glow of her proud beauty.

Drawing back a step or two, he said:—

"If I were a foreigner, I should be at liberty to compliment you on your appearance. A German might exclaim 'Reizend!' and 'Wunderschön!' to his heart's content; but English etiquette does not allow such candour—does it?"

"I call that truly ingenuous!" Eleanour said, laughing and blushing, and withdrawing a little from the full radiance which had fallen so becomingly on the polished whiteness of her shoulders, and the rich folds of her dress.

"I wonder for what countrywoman you might best pass?" Wilfred continued: "that black lace gives you a Spanish air; but your *tout-ensemble* of colouring curiously com-

bines English fairness and Southern sunniness. May I venture to suggest the making of one alteration in your toilette?"

"As many as you please. I am not obliged to carry out your suggestions, you know." This was said with saucy sweetness.

"I do not like to see those pomegranate flowers burning in hair as warmly-tinted as yours is."

"I will put anything you like better in my hair—but what? There are plenty of white camellias in the conservatory, but white does not suit me or my dress. Come and let us see what we can find."

She went towards the conservatory as she spoke, and he followed her: he tried the effect of one flower after another against her hair and cheek, quite gravely; till he had cut a handful of beautiful blossoms.

"I believe your artistic taste was not at

fault," he said at last. "The pomegranates must have the privilege of burning away where they are, for I can find nothing that suits you as well. I do not think I have the Southern taste and love for warm colouring: cool, pure-looking tints always delight me most. The pleasure they give seems *to* enter into my heart and brain, while that which I derive from 'gorgeous hues and rainbow dyes' is merely external and sensuous."

"That is because of the tendency of your nature to the cold ideality with which I lose no opportunity of reproaching you; and which, I should think," she added, softly and with a just perceptible shiver, "must sometimes cruelly chill those who love you."

Mrs. Lister's voice, announcing that the carriage had been at the door for some minutes, recalled the young people to the drawing-room.

Wilfred took Miss Narpenth's cloak from

her maid's hands, and wrapped it round her: then, after all, it was found that the pomegranate blossoms must be deposed—for the cloak, of Indian fabric, was of a deep crimson hue that did not harmonize with the scarlet of the flowers. From the bouquet Wilfred had cut—and which he had fastened together, as she wished to carry it in preference to one the gardener had provided—Eleanour selected a large cluster of white, star-like, waxy blossoms, the intoxicatingly delicious perfume of which seemed at variance with their cool and innocent aspect; these the maid fastened among the carefully careless arrangement of her mistress's tresses; and then, at last, Eleanour was ready to be handed to the carriage — into which Wilfred had already put Mrs. Lister.

"You look puzzled, Mr. Mason," Miss Narpenth said, by-and-by.

"I was wondering how you can travel by rail like this," glancing at her dress. "And wondering how we can get to town in time if we go all the distance in the carriage."

"Papa engaged a railway-carriage this morning. We always have one to ourselves when we go in for the evening; to go the whole distance by road in our own vehicle would be so very tedious — we need have started I don't know when."

"Miss Narpenth's habits are those of a spoiled child and a luxurious Princess," Mrs. Lister remarked.

This remark led Wilfred's thoughts into a sober channel, and Eleanour had to use some effort to banish the cold gloom that gathered over his face. As if both conscious of having produced this changed mood, and penitent that she had done so, Mrs. Lister seconded Miss Narpenth's

efforts; till she, perhaps, thought that they had met with a too complete success: then she sunk back against the cushions and closed her eyes, so that the animated conversation which shortened the journey—touching on most topics under the sun, and hardly interrupted by the changes from the carriage to the rail, and then back again to a carriage Mr. Narpenth sent to meet them—was in fact a *tête-à-tete.*

"Here already!" Eleanour and Wilfred exclaimed at the same time, as their conveyance drew into the line.

When Wilfred presently had a hand of each lady's on his arm, he felt how one hand trembled. The timid touch of the tremulous hand sent a thrill of strange feeling through him; while the contact of the other, resting on him with weight and confidence, did not affect him.

"Are you cold, Mrs. Lister, or afraid

of the crush?" he asked, involuntarily pressing the trembling hand closer to his side, and bending his face down, trying to see hers.

Her feet seemed almost to fail her for an instant; her other hand grasped his arm for support, with a gesture which reminded him of their first meeting. He saw that her lips moved, but did not catch what she said:—

"I am afraid you are ill, and quite unfit for the fatigue of such an expedition," he continued, unconsciously lowering his voice, so that Eleanour could not hear; but already Mrs. Lister had removed one hand, and walked as usual: possibly she had only tripped, he thought, and had caught at his arm in that manner to save herself from falling.

"Take no notice of me! That is always the truest kindness you can shew me!"

was the low, imploring answer; the words were spoken with a fervour that left no room for doubt as to their sincerity.

"I will obey you—only if there were any way in which I could serve you——"

"There is not; Miss Narpenth is speaking."

They had struggled through the crush by this time, and they now entered their box. Of the glasses levelled at them, many returned again and again to Miss Narpenth's face; of this, sitting full in the blaze of light, she was quite conscious and wholly careless. It was easy for any one to see that the person she cared most to please just now was at her side: she soon succeeded in winning his whole attention to herself again.

As the scene, the music, Eleanour's beauty and soft graciousness, even the subtle fragrance of the flowers in her hair, com-

bined to excite Wilfred, he completely gave himself up to present enjoyment. His companion thought him brilliantly, bewilderingly fascinating, and she did not disguise her pleasure in his society, her admiration of his conversation, or her warmly friendly feelings towards him. She, too, was somewhat carried away by impulses of the moment. The Opera was a new one—a pretty spectacle, set to pretty music: there was nothing absorbing or elevating in it—nothing to carry the imagination beyond the pleasure of the present.

By-and-by, Mrs. Lister leant behind Wilfred, to say to Eleanour, "Captain Narpenth is in a box immediately opposite, and has, for some time, been trying to catch your eye; he has just left his seat now—I think he is coming here."

Wilfred did not catch Mrs. Lister's words, but he saw Eleanour's colour rise; she had

turned to him, as if to make some explanation, when the door of the box opened, and a gentleman entered. His first words were of flippant compliment to Mrs. Lister —the manner in which they were spoken, more than the words themselves, made Wilfred's blood tingle — then he turned to Eleanour, shook hands with her, enquired for the "governor," and looked significantly from her to Wilfred.

Eleanour understood the look; her manner was hurried and uneasy as she introduced Captain Narpenth to Mr. Wilfred Mason.

Captain Narpenth bowed with a smile meant to be fascinating; Wilfred struck him as looking distinguished, and he did not recognize his own coat. But after he had exchanged a few sentences in an undertone with Mrs. Lister, the expression of his face changed completely; the glance

he bestowed, first upon Wilfred, then upon Eleanour, was one of undisguised hostility. It passed unnoticed with Wilfred, but Eleanour met it with a look of defiant haughtiness.

Captain Narpenth soon left their box, bidding Eleanour tell the governor that he "should look him up soon:" but the pleasure of Eleanour's evening appeared to be spoilt; she was conscious that a critical and hostile glass was often turned upon her and upon her companion, and that each look she bestowed upon Wilfred was noticed and interpreted. She grew absent, and ill at ease.

When all was over—when the curtain had fallen, and the house was growing empty—she let Wilfred wrap her cloak round her, and passed her hand within his arm: leaning on it, and with her softly rounded cheek very close to him,

almost touching his shoulder, she said pleadingly, "Do not let us hurry—we may never in all our lives be together here again. Let the crowd quite clear off before we leave; let us see how the house looks when it is empty."

They lingered, and philosophized; and there was a touch of melancholy and of cynicism in their philosophizing, as if each were feeling inwardly, "This cannot last —our pleasure cannot last—an evil day for us is approaching!"

Meanwhile Eleanour's voice was low when she spoke—her smile was soft when she listened—her eyes, when they met his, had a touch of sweet and thoughtful sadness in them, which greatly enhanced their charm; and it was evident that she loved to let her hand rest confidingly on his arm.

Was Wilfred proof against this subtle

flattery of preference? Wilfred, who all his life had hungered and thirsted for love, sympathy, and happiness.

CHAPTER III.

"All the forgiveness I can make you is—
To love you, which I *will* do, and desire
Nothing but love again."

"I am not one of those weak ladies,
Who (barren of all other worth) are proud
Of what they cannot truly call their own—
Their birth and fortune, which are things without them."

"Mrs. Wickens has been asking me when we intend to leave Thorndon and come to town 'for good?'" Mr. Narpenth said to Eleanour, as they sat at a very late breakfast next morning, amid that swathed-up splendour peculiar to London mansions when their owners are out of town.

"Oh! not yet, papa! I like Thorndon so much better," was Eleanour's answer, as she glanced round. She was happy this morning—her dreams had been pleasant—Captain Narpenth had not intruded into them. Yesterday she had felt, or fancied, a beneficent change in Wilfred's manner towards her—a change to something warmer and more nearly approaching tenderness than that air of half-jesting courtesy and half-sarcastic admiration which she had begun to feel would cause her many a soul-shiver did it last much longer.

Till Mrs. Lister reminded her to do so, Eleanour forgot to deliver Captain Narpenth's message to her father; it was received with a half-comic groan, and a *sotto voce* comment of—"I suppose he wants something, as he talks of 'looking me up.'"

Wilfred presently followed Eleanour to

the window and the balcony outside it, to which she moved when she left the breakfast-table, in order to see how some plants—left there since the spring—had fared through the dust and heat of the summer. While he appeared to be only intent on watching the flitting about of her jewelled hand, grave thoughts—the cares of this world, which were for him by no means the cares of riches—occupied him. He had resolved to consult Mr. Narpenth, whom he regarded as an intelligently practical man, and whom he knew to be kindly disposed towards himself, about his present position and his future way of life. Believing that he only waited for a convenient opportunity of doing this, he nevertheless neglected to seek an opportunity, and allowed himself to delay indefinitely. Yet now while he seemed to be lost, while Eleanour

imagined that he was lost, in some poetical reverie, he was in reality pondering over the most prosaic thoughts, schemes, and difficulties.

His attention was arrested by hearing Mr. Narpenth, who had also approached the window, say,

"As you are in town why not see a physician this morning, Mrs. Lister. I am sure you have one of your worst headaches—they become more severe, and more frequent. I think you will be wrong if you do not have medical advice. Dr. Myers will call if I send him a line—shall I do so?"

"Thank you, Mr. Narpenth, you are very good; but I know, by experience, that physicians can do nothing for me. I begin to think I shall have to try a complete change. I must leave your house, if I

become unfit for my position in it, and I fear that I am becoming unfit for it."

Mr. Narpenth said something kindly polite in answer to this speech. At that moment Wilfred, irresistibly attracted, turned, and met Mrs. Lister's eyes, which had been fixed upon his half-averted face. Her face appeared to him to be full of mingled pain and courage; something in it, in the expression he had surprised in her eyes, turning on her so quickly, and in the tone of her last meek words, went strangely to his heart.

Mr. Narpenth called his daughter.

"Eleanour! Mrs. Lister talks of the probability of leaving us. You cannot allow her to think of that, can you? Use your influence with her, my dear, and persuade her to have advice for these troublesome headaches."

Miss Narpenth looked straight into Mrs. Lister's face, as she answered,

"Mrs. Lister, papa, may have good reasons for wishing to leave us. Of course we should be sorry to lose her; but we must allow her to be the best judge of her own affairs."

Probably this was quite a random stroke; dictated by the very vaguest of vague jealousies, growing in a soil congenial to such growths; but it sent a flush into Mrs. Lister's face, and, Wilfred thought, judging by a certain shrinking from the looks fixed on her, fear and pain into her heart.

Had Eleanour spoken gently and tenderly to Mrs. Lister, Wilfred would have been grateful to her for doing so; now he turned from her with coldness, and a momentary disgust. Yet what was Mrs. Lister to him? And might not Miss Narpenth have her own just reasons for regarding Mrs. Lister with suspicion and growing dislike?

"Have you any shopping to do, Eleanour? Or you, Mason, any business to trans-

act? Can you pass the time pleasantly till afternoon, and then return to Thorndon when I do?" Mr. Narpenth asked.

This last question answered in the affirmative, Mr. Narpenth left the room and the house; Wilfred—who might naturally have offered to walk a little way with him, and might then have broached the subject so much on his mind — had lost another opportunity of putting his resolution into effect. Eleanour passed into an adjoining room, and began to turn over an accumulation of books and periodicals; seeking for something of which she had been talking with Wilfred the night before. Instead of joining her, as she had expected him to do, he turned to Mrs. Lister. She stood by the window, looking out: the wasted figure, with its heavy falling black drapery, the drooped arms, and tightly-locked hands, the erect head and straining outward gaze—all seemed to tell such a

tale of struggle and suffering that his heart was stirred within him. He felt impelled to speak to her, to endeavour to suggest consolation; or, at least, to express sympathy, and break the spell of pain that held her.

He approached her; in spite of that appearance of absorbing struggle she felt his approach; her face relaxed something of its rigidity. When he spoke to her in words, commonplace perhaps, yet made tender by gentleness of utterance and sincerity of feeling, its whole aspect changed; she turned it on him, softened to express a joy that gave it an unearthly beauty. Wilfred trembled before her—words died upon his lips—he grew pale and red by turns beneath the long, searching gaze fixed on him. The few moments during which they stood thus—face to face, eye to eye—were to him moments of the profoundest and most incomprehensible emotion. The light of joy in Mrs.

Lister's face soon began to flicker—soon it died out wholly; her mouth quivered, then became drawn and distorted, and her brow contracted painfully, disfiguringly: she sank heavily into a chair behind her, shivered convulsively, and covered her face with her hands.

Eleanour, as she pursued her search in the next room, was softly singing a gay air from last night's opera, and she did not hear Wilfred's first frightened call. When he called her again, she had just come upon the volume she required; before attending to his summons, she waited to extricate it from many others, and this took time.

Meanwhile, by an heroic effort, Mrs. Lister had partially recovered her self-control. Removing her hands from her face, showing it blanched to an ashen pallor, she said:—

"Do not notice me—do not call attention to me, I beg of you!"

She rose as she spoke. Leaning on the chair, she added, solemnly: "God reward you for your tender compassion! May He pour down His best blessings upon you abundantly! May He give you peace and prosperity, and grant you your heart's desire! Oh, pray for me that He may give His consolation to one, alone and childless, who might now have been the mother of such a son!"

Declining his arm, she moved towards the door with a feeble but steady gait. Wilfred sank into the chair she had just left; overpowered by sensations which left no room for thought, and amid which was dominant an intense and unutterable longing, after he knew not what, which seemed to carry him out of and beyond himself.

It was only for a very few moments

that he was left alone, or he might have fainted. Miss Narpenth's approach necessitating self-command, caused a sudden revulsion of feeling.

"I have found it at last, Mr. Mason—did you call me just now?" she said, as she came nearer. "Good heavens! how ill you look—as white as marble! What is the matter? What can I get you?"

Wilfred rose hastily, and the blood came back to his face beneath her look of tender alarm and anxiety.

"You will laugh at my weakness!" he said; and then he paused to consider; weighing Mrs. Lister's evident wish to escape attention against the danger he thought there might be in leaving her without aid in her present state. "I am afraid you will entertain supreme contempt for me if I confess that for a few moments, just before you came to me, I felt as I should imagine

that people feel when they are about to faint."

Eleanour looked at him gravely.

"You are not strong, and do not take half enough care of yourself; sit down again; I shall get you something."

Wilfred protested in vain; Miss Narpenth left the room and returned with something in a glass which she insisted on his drinking, standing before him with an imperious air till he obeyed her.

"Are you sure that you feel well again?" she asked, when she had left him to himself for a short time. "Mrs. Wickens is very anxious to administer a dose of her own particular cordial; I tried to protect you from it, for it is very nasty; but if I ring she is going to appear with it—shall I ring?"

She put her hand on the bell—Wilfred darted across the room with an activity

that testified to the genuineness of his recovery. Having arrested her hand, it somehow happened that the hand was held in his for a few moments.

"I think there is a person in this house far more in need of Miss Narpenth's kind attention than her humble servant," he said, with an effort to speak lightly, as he relinquished her hand. "Your friend, Mrs. Lister, is very ill this morning, I fear."

"Just now she seems rather subject to mysterious attacks of indisposition," Eleanour answered, coldly.

"If they are mysterious, they are only too genuine."

"They excite a great deal of sympathy in Mr. Mason."

"I should have imagined that in any good-hearted woman they would have excited more sympathy and more compassion than they appear to do in Miss Nar-

penth; but I know very little of women, as Miss Narpenth has often told me."

Miss Narpenth bit her lips, to keep back a passionate answer. She stood gazing into the fire; leaning on the back of a chair, tapping the ground impatiently with one foot, and looking especially haughty.

The silence that ensued was broken by a footstep across the room, the closing of the room-door, soon after of the house-door.

Eleanour looked round—yes, it was Wilfred who had gone out! He must be very angry to leave her so abruptly, she thought. She hastened to the window—he had crossed to the opposite side of the street—she saw him, and she watched him as long as he was in sight; he did not look up or look back. All the haughty sullenness left Miss Narpenth's face, and tears shone in her eyes.

Presently she startled the silence of the

room, and perhaps of her own heart, by a few low words.

"I love him! Yes, I mistrust her—fear her—almost hate her—but I love him."

She grew pale when she had spoken; but after a few moments she added:—

"Yes! it is so—I love again—I love him! I am released from the childish vow which I was childishly afraid to break. I love him! If he should not return!—why, I would hunt him out and humble myself before him! I love him!"

She began to pace the rooms from end to end with noiseless footsteps and a musing face; often sighing, often smiling,—now, mockingly, at the old love—now, tenderly, over the new.

By-and-by, when Wilfred did not come back, and she was tired of her own society, she rang, and ordered that a carriage should be sent for. In going to her own apart-

ment to put on her bonnet she passed the door of Mrs. Lister's. After hesitating outside it for a few moments, she rapped; receiving no answer, she entered softly.

A heavy narcotic smell pervaded the darkened room, and Mrs. Lister's black-robed figure lay on the bed motionless. Eleanour approached cautiously, lest she should be asleep; but either the opiate had not yet taken effect, or it had excited instead of soothing the sufferer.

Mrs. Lister's eyes were wide and brilliant—a red spot burnt on each cheek, and her dark abundant hair was scattered wildly over the pillow.

Eleanour paused before she spoke; she wished to be gentle, and even affectionate—she really felt some compassion in the presence of such evident suffering; but she was also compelled to feel admiration for the strange beauty of the face on which she

looked—and, to a jealous nature, admiration and repugnance too often come hand in hand.

Mrs. Lister did not at first seem conscious of her presence; her eyes were fixed, and her fingers incessantly busy.

"I am afraid you are very ill, dear Mrs. Lister. May I send for a doctor? Will you see one if I do?" asked Eleanour.

Sense and recognition seemed to come but slowly into the eyes which, at the sound of her voice, now turned themselves on Miss Narpenth's face.

"Beautiful, but not good—passionate, but not tender—obstinate, but not firm—her heart is cold, while her love is hot; she is a woman, with little of womanliness but her beauty. Not for him—she must not win him; she could tear a mother from her son, a son from his

mother—could trample on any ties, crush any hearts: she is cruel, selfish, headstrong; treacherous and weak!"

Having repeated this, as a child in feverish sleep will say over the day's painfully-learnt task—as a formula which she had learned by heart, and which she repeated without attaching any sense to the words, and with her gaze all the while fixed full upon the woman beside her bed—Mrs. Lister passed one hand over her brow, and seemed to recollect herself a little.

Eleanour, really alarmed, having for a moment recoiled, now possessed herself of the other burning hand, exclaiming:—

"Mrs. Lister! Mrs. Lister! what can I do for you? Do you hear me, Mrs. Lister!"

The poor lady, half raising herself from the bed, keeping her eyes on Eleanour,

re-mastered her straying faculties with great and evident effort.

"It is very kind of you to come," she said, with a half-frightened look. "Have I been talking strangely? The heat last evening and a sleepless night made me feel very ill. I have taken an overdose of a sedative medicine I am afraid—and that has made me feverish. If I can sleep quietly for an hour or two, I shall be quite well again. Had you been here long?"

"Only a few moments. Can I not get you anything?"

"Nothing, thank you—I want nothing but rest."

"I am sorry I disturbed you then; but Mr. Mason is very anxious about your health." She watched the effect of these words.

"He is very kind, but there is no cause for anxiety."

As she spoke, wearily enough, she turned her face towards the wall; so Eleanour did not see what impression had been made by her words.

"The house will be perfectly quiet. Mr. Mason is out, and I am going out. I hope you will sleep, and that I shall find you much better on my return. You will be sure to ring if you require anything."

"Oh, yes, thank you." She spoke as if already feeling drowsy, and Eleanour left the room; but before she reached her own she heard the key turned in the lock of Mrs. Lister's door; the proud blood rushed wildly across her face at the sound.

"Why do I let her remain, now that we distrust each other—why does she desire to remain?"—were questions Eleanour asked herself.

The first she could have answered, had she chosen: she was somewhat afraid to

quarrel with Mrs. Lister, who was acquainted with a passage in her early life which she would not, for the world, that Wilfred should become acquainted with. The second question her jealousy answered vaguely, and little to her satisfaction.

Mr. Narpenth, Wilfred, and Eleanour met to partake of a late luncheon, before going back to Thorndon; but Mrs. Lister did not appear till the carriage was at the door, and then her veil was drawn over her face.

Wilfred, having had time during his solitary rambles to think over his behaviour to Miss Narpenth, was penitent. He considered that his conduct to Eleanour had been ungrateful in the extreme; wanting in common respect; utterly unworthy of a gentleman. He considered, too, that she had shown wonderful moderation and self-restraint. He could not understand how interest in Mrs. Lister, and compassion for her, could have

led him so far astray: he called himself a conceited and presumptuous fool, for having imagined that he was authorized to reprove a lady over whom he had no right to believe that he possessed influence—over whom he had no rights at all, but such as her indulgent kindness had given him.

"What may all these packages be, Eleanour?" Mr. Narpenth said, seeing several brought from the house to the carriage.

"As I was in town I thought I would buy some drawing materials, in case the spirit should move me to make use of them." Eleanour answered, with a flushing face that contradicted the affected carelessness of her manner.

"Is this the result of your critical encouragement?" Mr. Narpenth asked, turning a pleasant countenance upon Wilfred.

"I shall not venture to believe so," Wilfred answered. Yet a hastily-averted

glance of Eleanour's might have encouraged him to such a belief.

Mr. Narpenth asked Wilfred to remain at Thorndon House to dine, and pass the evening. Being anxious to make his peace with Eleanour immediately, he did not require much persuasion to induce him to do so.

In the course of the evening he found an opportunity of begging forgiveness for his presumptuous interference.

"There is nothing to forgive. All the forgiveness I can make you is—to like you all the better for having been so open with me. There was no presumption," Eleanour continued. "Thank you for a merited rebuke; an antipathy, which is growing uncontrollably and incomprehensibly strong, must serve as a reason—though I know that it is no excuse—for an apparent want of feeling. Say no more about the matter, if you

please. I do not like that you should ask my forgiveness, when I know that I only was in fault."

She held out her hand, and looked at him with softly brilliant eyes.

"I am silenced, but not convinced," Wilfred said, as he bent over the proffered hand—more inclined to press it to his lips than he had ever been before.

Thinking over the event of the last two days, as he returned to his poor quarters, he almost arrived at a very startling conclusion; but a thought that seemed a possible truth in the open air, and under the softly mysterious light of the stars, appeared as a ludicrously-wild phantasy in his mean little room—by the dingy flare of the candle to which he sat down to read the letters of various dates which he had received on applying for them at the post-office. The letters, however, were

some of them long, and he was sleepy; so they were put away, to be perused at leisure the next morning.

CHAPTER IV.

"Affliction, when I know it, is but this—
A deep alloy, whereby man tougher is
To bear the hammer—
* * * * * *
Man is his own star, and that soul that can
Be honest is the only perfect man."

AMONG Wilfred's letters were several from Herbert Southern, of variously ancient dates; the latest written was a brief note, dated a month ago. Speaking, it said, from amidst death and pestilence, to demand if the friendship which had for so long given no sign had expired—if the (the writer supposed) now celebrated author had forgotten the friends of less fortunate days.

From Herbert's letters Wilfred gleaned a good deal of information about the Southern family. That another Miss Southern had been married, and that among her maidens on the wedding-day—"your little favourite of old times looked especially lovely—for all the world like a lily of the valley." That Beech Holmes was standing empty; and Felicia, the only Miss Southern now, and her mother, were gone to live abroad for the present—that Felicia's education might be completed economically.

Regarding Herbert himself Wilfred found out a good deal from these letters: he had been working hard—his practice had much improved—he was engaged to be married, the earliest among them told him—he recognized the young lady's name as that of a girl who had been a boyish flame of Herbert's.

A letter of later date contained the in-

formation that the engagement had been broken off by the lady; of whom Herbert, nevertheless, wrote reverently and tenderly, adding—"Of course, all is always for the best, though one can't always see it; but, in this instance, I can now see how wisely things have been ordered—since I last wrote circumstances have changed my position."

Then he alluded to a law-suit—to difficulties and involvements connected with the possession of Beech Holmes—which had straitened his mother's circumstances, and which made it necessary for him to devote himself entirely to her interests.

Having read Herbert Southern's letters, first at random, and then according to their dates, Wilfred mused over them.

"A brave, faithful, noble fellow!—I am not worth his troubling himself about; but I will write to him to-day. 'From amidst death and pestilence'—I trust he won't be

reckless. For his mother's sake he will not, and for Felicia's—'especially lovely, for all the world like a lily of the valley'—so I can fancy her—in her pure sweetness, her delicate bloom, her untroubled serenity."

Then, after looking over the last letter but one again—

"A faithful fellow, indeed!" Wilfred exclaimed; "the suffering he has gone through must have been fiery, and he comes out of the furnace unscathed: untouched with cynicism; with no good feeling weakened; with no high courage quenched, and with his faith in God, in man, even in woman, unshaken! What am I compared with such a man? 'Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel,' is the motto I ought to take for mine; while there is no motto too noble to be honoured by his use, and none, that I know, so free from boastful self-assertion that he would assume it."

Wilfred's heart glowed with remorseful affection as he thought of his friend; but it did not occur to him to fear that it might already be too late to give that sign for which Herbert had evidently longed with a deep and strong longing.

The next letter that he opened changed the current of his thoughts—it was from his late guardian's housekeeper; she had before addressed him at long intervals. Her master's health was breaking, Mrs. Smith feared, and she could not get him to have advice, or to make use of any of her own simple medicines: he made no secret of the fact that he believed himself to be liable to attacks of a dangerous disease which would probably prove fatal; but he grew angry if she begged him to see a doctor, and she dared do nothing on her own authority.

As Wilfred read her badly-scrawled lines

a gulph seemed to open at his feet. Just as he was beginning to take life easily, ceasing to fret at the mystery behind him, or the probable misery before, he was threatened with the once-so-eagerly desired knowledge, nearly threatened : this seemed cruel.

"But when this knowledge comes to me, it will come through Felicia's hands. That is a good omen. Is it possible that it may be knowledge pointing to a prospect, and leading to a chance of happiness? Or will it be knowledge that ought, ever afterwards, to keep me from seeking the society of the good and pure?"

After a pause, he added:—

"To fear the worst is morbid. Surely I have passed the stage of existence when there is a certain amount of luxury in self-torment. Have I not the power of making friends who value me for myself alone?

Have the Narpenths ever troubled themselves about my birth or parentage? Perhaps, after all my self-tormenting, the day is gone by when people cared much for these things, and the time come when a man is judged only by what he himself is; and yet, and yet, into what a gulph of inherited disgrace and misery may not this threatening knowledge plunge me? And even if it can be kept from the world, will not the burden of inherited shame press heavily upon my consciousness?—Will not the fear of discovery pursue me?"

His other letters, which he now opened to escape from his own thoughts, were from the editor of one of those publications any connection with which he had mentally forsworn; they solicited his contribution to its pages of some "story of thrilling interest and startling incident"—offering him handsome remuneration, and promising inviolable secrecy.

He discoursed with the tempter. Small as his expenses had been since he had lived at Thorndon, his purse was nearly empty now, and his expenses were likely to increase; he could not remain at Thorndon much longer, not after the Narpenths left it—it would be intolerably dull; and Mr. Narpenth complained of the time consumed in travelling to and fro, now that the shortest days were at hand. Unless he gave up all intercourse with the Narpenths, he knew that he could not, on his return to town, live as frugally as he had done at Thorndon. Almost before he knew what he did he had scribbled a line to the importunate editor, promising him the required weekly instalments of "the kind of thing" he desired.

"It shall be the last time!" he assured himself.

Wilfred believed that he was now ready

to embrace any routine employment that could bring as its reward ease, and that quiet, of either rest or stagnation, which he now desired—wealth, and such means as wealth offers for the gratification of the more luxurious claims of soul and body. He believed that he had done with those unreasonable cravings after more than human bliss—after ideal happiness—which had rendered his early life restless, and impossible to satisfy; and that he was prepared to let the real things of this world engross him. Wealth presented itself in an attractive guise in Mr. Narpenth's establishment; and he was tired of a poverty in which the æsthetic part of his nature found no nourishment.

Believing—and Eleanour's admiration of the series of short poems which he had been at work upon did not shake this belief—that his inspiration, which had, he

thought, been the inspiration of youth, of other men's thoughts, and of misery, had left him, and that he was, therefore, unfit for the nobler work of his profession, he was not yet lost enough to self-respect—and to respect for that profession—deliberately to propose to himself to live upon the dregs of his powers, directed towards ignoble ends. It was necessity, he said, that led him to sin this one time more—to sin, not against the strictest morality, or even against ethical taste—for, with all his weaknesses and errors, he was pure of heart and free from guile to an unusual degree—but against his own light and knowledge, against his exalted idea of what an author should be—a master, not a slave: subject to nothing external to his own God-given gifts; and, while subjecting sense to these, entirely subjecting them to will. Using them with clean hands—in innocency of heart,

and, according to his own perceptions of truth and beauty—for the glory of their Giver; working without thought or care for the praise or blame of the multitude, although this praise or blame, poured upon work achieved, might have power to sweeten or to embitter life.

To hold this theory, and then to find himself writing at so much a page for G.'s Miscellany—striving to suit both his stuff and the fashion of it to the taste of his public, racking his brains for sufficiently startling incidents and highly-wrought situations—this was humiliating enough: he was surely quite right in feeling that it was so; in thinking that honest labour of any kind —even in the fields, or on the roads—would be less really humiliating.

When, by the distasteful work of two or three days, material enough had been manufactured to supply the readers of G.'s

Miscellany with as many weekly portions of their favourite food, Wilfred fell to groping among old papers. He drew out the unpublished poem, written so long ago with the hope of offering it to Felicia, which he had kept by him ever since, and began turning over its leaves.

"How would this strike Miss Narpenth? What should I think of it now?" he wondered; and he half resolved, at some time or other, to read parts of it to Eleanour. At present he did not feel himself attracted towards Thorndon House: many days passed without his going there or seeing anything of the Narpenths. After that agitating scene with Mrs. Lister, he felt reluctant to meet her again; he felt that his presence unnerved her—reminding her, he supposed, of the son to whom she had alluded when she blessed him so solemnly; a son whom she had, perhaps, lost in some peculiarly painful way.

CHAPTER V.

> "And ofttimes love that wins not love's return
> Doth but wax stronger, and more fiercely burn."

THIS time Eleanour did not seek Wilfred; a fortnight—passed without even a brief and accidental meeting—appeared a very blank fortnight to Wilfred when he looked back upon it. Gloom and discontent gathered about him. He fancied that it was a foreboding sense of something impending that was heavy upon him. His mind dwelt much upon the secret of his life. For change of thought, and for relief from his own society, he was at

last driven once more to Thorndon House. He took with him part of the MS. that he desired to read to Eleanour.

On enquiring for Miss Narpenth, he was conducted at once to her painting-room—as, no doubt, she had given orders that he should be if he should call.

As he entered, the light fell so full on his own eyes that the rapid change of expression in Eleanour's face was lost upon him. A bright-haired little child standing before Miss Narpenth had evidently been serving as a model; both the room—picturesquely littered with artistic properties—and the artist herself, in a simple dress of a warm yet sober colour, looked charmingly business-like.

"At last!" was Eleanour's exclamation, as she gave Wilfred her hand.

"I shall hardly be welcome this morning—I fear I shall disturb you."

"You are always welcome—but you are particularly so this morning. I have been wanting advice or criticism—for want of them I was getting tired of my work."

"Have you not been doing too much—beginning too desperately? You do not look so well as when I saw you last."

"I never can do things by halves—can you?"

"I am afraid that I can, only too easily," Wilfred answered; he stood by her side, studying her picture while he spoke. "I do not think I am particularly thorough in anything," he went on. "I know that I am wanting in decision of character, and in firmness in every way. It is most difficult to me always to do what people call 'making up one's mind;' and if I do by any chance make mine up the slightest thing unmakes it again. Do not, I beg, look upon me as a person whose

judgment, even in trivial matters, is to be relied upon. I am, and I fear always shall be, 'unstable as water.'"

"I may do as I like about believing you, Mr. Mason—I mean about believing in the justice of your self-estimate. I fancy, however, that the operation of making up one's mind is only easy to people of narrow minds and of mental short-sightedness: to people, who can see only one side of a subject at a time, and only that when it is near to them."

"A comfortable doctrine, which we will adopt!" Wilfred said, smiling.

Miss Narpenth had resumed her brush. Wilfred suddenly turned his eyes from their attentive study of the picture on the easel, to fix them upon the artist's face.

"I am devoured by curiosity to know the exact nature of that vow from which I find that you have released yourself.

Have you broken it, or have you fulfilled some conditions of release?"

She quickly averted her head, stooping to select another brush; but he saw how warm a crimson replaced her former paleness—for she was pale this morning, and her eyes told of wakeful nights.

"I beg of you never to repeat that question," she said.

Her blush was faintly repeated on Wilfred's face—he did not know why—but he felt ill at ease, conscious of having been guilty of an indiscretion.

An awkward silence ensued; while it lasted Eleanour's brush was aimlessly busy, and the colour had time to fade slowly from her cheeks.

"Has your picture a name?" Wilfred asked by-and-by.

"A common-place one," Eleanor answered, without looking up. "'Spring and

Autumn'—I shall be very glad if you will find me a better name."

"'Spring' is very lovely, but I think you have refined upon your rustic model almost too much—the autumn-hedge was surely painted outdoors?"

"It is painted from an old sketch that was made outdoors."

"What is little 'Spring' looking for?"

"Acorns among the dead leaves."

"Unless you spoil it in the working-up, the picture will be a perfect one in its way, I think."

"I wish you would help me to patience in the working-up by reading to me—I have been working here all alone nearly all day for so many days now, and I am quite tired of myself! May I ask what you have been doing all this long time? Have you been writing? May I know what?"

"I have brought something with me, parts of which I can read to you if you like—but it is nothing new."

"I shall not like to have only parts read—I must have the whole. Let me bring a comfortable chair more into the light for you."

"And your little model?" he asked, as he prevented Eleanour from doing this. "Surely the child is tired; she looks as if she might fall off to sleep where she stands."

"She may go now—I shall work on the background for the rest of the morning. Mrs. Lister will see her duly petted and sent safe home. You may go now, Mary; come at the same time to-morrow, remember."

"Me want to see my picter," was the somewhat rebellious-sounding answer.

"Another time, child—go now."

But Wilfred lifted the little thing in his arms and let her look at the picture

as long as she pleased; then he carried her to the door of the room, where he was told that she would find an old friend in Mrs. Lister, but he did not himself enter it.

Eleanour watched him leave the room, with the child in his arms.

"How gentle and tender-hearted he is!" she murmured, and tears came to her eyes. "If he loved me, I might learn to be gentle too, for his sake. Ah, God! if he loved me! But how can he love me? I must seem so rough and brusque to one who is himself so gentle! He might change all that if he loved me! I will try and change that he may love me."

Wilfred returned. After he had commenced reading, the artist's work progressed but very slowly. By-and-by, when he paused, he found her looking at him, only listening, not even making a pretence of painting. The light which glanced down on one side the face

turned towards him showed him that tears sparkled on her lashes.

"Remember that my principal object in reading this poem to you is to provoke you to an edifying, and to me instructive, opposition," he said, gaily. "I expect that you will defend your different views keenly and brilliantly; that you will give me more insight into my subject by doing so."

"You will be disappointed," she answered, and her eyes drooped before his; but presently she raised them and said with some heat, "Why should you take it for granted that I shall not agree with you? Why should you wish to provoke me to express opinions different from yours?"

"Is not this poem an elaboration of such sentiments as you say I always treat coldly, too generally and too ideally? I, who, you tell me, know so little of women, must surely lay bare my ignorance when I presume to write so much about a woman's heart."

"I do not believe that your Lila is an ideal character. You have known a woman whom you believed you were describing when you described Lila. I do not feel as if *you* had written this poem—it saddens me to think you did—I do not know why, except that it makes you seem strange to me. I feel an awe of one who has expressed a faith so much fuller and firmer than I have ever dreamt of—of one who regards life as so solemn, and art as so holy, a responsibility. You have laid a weight upon my spirit. You have not written this lately? When did you write it? What had happened to you? Had you been very ill, near death?—or had you experienced some great sorrow?"

Wilfred did not heed the growing but suppressed passion of her manner. He answered, half-jestingly, and yet at heart quite reverently:—

"My guardian-angel had been with me —her influence lingered about me."

"I was right then — your Lila *is* a real woman? You call her your guardian-angel? You have no sister, and your mother died when you were very young—who then is your guardian-angel?"

She did not trust herself to look at him as she asked this.

"My Lila is not the portrait of a real woman. I knew a child once who may have grown into such a woman. You must use the past tense, and not the present, when you speak of my guardian-angel," Wilfred said mournfully.

"She is dead, then?"

Real triumph and affected sympathy struggled in her voice and manner. At this moment, before he had answered, they were both startled. Mrs. Lister came between them. The door was hidden by the easel,

and she had entered noiselessly, bringing Miss Narpenth a note.

"It might have waited," was Eleanour's comment as she took it.

"No, for an answer is required."

These two brief and simple sentences were spoken in a way that grated harshly on Wilfred's ear. In the faces of both the speakers there was something from which he averted his eyes. While Eleanour opened and read her note, he glanced down the columns of an old newspaper which happened to lie near him with some of Miss Narpenth's paints and brushes upon it. The record of births, deaths, and marriages caught his eye—though blotched with paint it was legible; presently he uttered an exclamation of pain—stooped over the paper, as if to ascertain that his eyes had not deceived him, then sank back into his chair, covering his face with his hands.

Mrs. Lister was just leaving the room—his exclamation drew her back to his side. To Eleanour's amazement she laid her hand upon his shoulder and bent a face blanched to corpse-like pallor down to his, to read what he had read. Her touch, her breath upon his cheek, roused Wilfred; he lifted his eyes to hers and drank in their intensity of expression; then, suddenly, she started away from him—it seemed as if she fled before the wonder depicted in his face. She murmured a few faltering words, and left the room; not before he had gratefully pressed her hand.

"It cannot be!" Wilfred cried. Once more he read the words that had shocked him—this time he noted the date—"A week after he wrote that letter—a fortnight before I sent him that assurance of remembrance and friendship for which he longed—while I wrote he was already dead!"

He had almost forgotten Miss Narpenth's presence—she had stood apart, and watched Mrs. Lister with glowing eyes. She approached him now and asked with quivering lips, "Will you not speak to me? Will you not let me share your sorrow? Is any one whom you loved dead?"

He pointed to the line recording Herbert Southern's death: he said nothing, but prepared to go—mechanically rolling up his manuscript, and looking vaguely for his gloves and hat. There was dull pain at his heart, and a weight seemed to press upon his brain.

"*Do* speak to me; do tell me something about this friend. It breaks my heart to see you look so stricken."

"I cannot speak of it to-day," he said hoarsely, taking some steps towards the door.

"At least promise that you will come to-morrow. I shall be miserable, thinking of

you as suffering and alone; and I cannot —I may not—go to you, you know. At least promise me that you will come here, to me, to-morrow."

She had followed him to the door, keeping her hand upon his arm and her eyes upon his face.

"I must think. I can promise nothing now," was all his answer.

Her hand fell from his arm unheeded—he was gone!

If he could have seen her face as she turned from the closed door!

"Gentle, tender for every one else—only stern, and cold, and hard for me! Tender and gentle to a beggar-child—to a poor companion! Only stern for me! And I—I love him!"

She locked the door, and, throwing herself upon a couch, let her passion — as much of anger as of love or grief—have

way. When at last she rose—with wild, disordered hair, swollen eye-lids and inflamed cheeks—she was not beautiful to look upon.

The next day passed somehow, but Wilfred did not come; nor did he come on the next, nor on the next to that.

After having waited three days, Miss Narpenth walked to the Cottage, and ascertained, what Mrs. Lister could already have told her—for she found that she had been there before her—that Wilfred had left it on the same day on which she had seen him last. But her visit was not quite without result, for it reminded Mrs. Greenman of a note for Mr. Narpenth which she had been bidden to deliver. This note, apologizing for its writer's hasty departure, expressed a hope that he and Mr. and Miss Narpenth might soon meet in town. On this expression of hope Eleanour was obliged to live, or to starve, for the present.

CHAPTER VI.

> "My bark of life rides will-less up and down,
> Needing no storm to wreck it on the shore;
> A sudden swell or quicker breathed out sigh
> Of wave or wind of passion—all is o'er."

> "Ich seh dein schönes Angesicht
> Ich seh die Schatten der Zukunft nicht."

WILFRED's first feeling on realizing the fact that his friend—the one friend of his boyhood and youth—was dead, was a desire to see some of the friends of that lost friend, and to learn more than was told him by the words of the newspaper, though they—"from fever taken while attending the sick poor of Manchester"—told much.

He went to town, and to the Landon's

house, that same evening. The house was shut up, and the woman in charge of it could not give him much definite information.

There had been a deal of trouble in the family, she knew—money-troubles, as well as death and sickness. She had heard that Mr. Southern's mother, and his youngest sister, got home just in time to see him before he died—and that since then the young lady had had the fever herself. The young lady was well again now, the woman believed, and she had gone abroad again with her mother, as the doctors ordered a warmer climate for her; and Mr. and Mrs. Landon had gone, too, to see them settled; and Mrs. Landon's children were at Mrs. John Landon's; and when Mr. and Mrs. Landon would return, she didn't in the least know.

This was all Wilfred could learn. Both his grief for his friend and his sympathy with

those who mourned him were embittered, not only by a remorseful sense of his own negligence, but also by a quite unreasonable resentment, at finding himself cut off from all intercourse with the afflicted family.

A wet and gloomy December seemed doubly gloomy in London; but he did not care to return to Thorndon—he hired such a miserable lodging as he could afford, and allowed himself to fall into a state of deep and listless despondency. One dreary day followed upon another, and he made no effort to break their dull routine of dreariness. The coming of Christmas did not stir him, nor did the breaking of a new year. The whole legion of familiar fiends were in possession.

Approaching Mr. Narpenth's house in one of his aimless walks—drawn there by some faint attraction which he did not strive to resist—he saw that a carriage waited before

the door, and concluded that his friends were now in town.

It was night, and he could stand unobserved to watch who should get into it. As Miss Narpenth came out of the house the light of a lamp showed him the paleness of her face; he thought that he read weary and often disappointed expectancy in the glance she threw to the right and left as she crossed the pavement—while a similar gesture of Mrs. Lister's appeared to him to express some haunting fear and dread. No doubt he was morbidly fanciful. Believing himself to be slighted and overlooked by the Southerns, it rather gratified him to believe that it was in his power to make any human being less happy by his neglect. By reason of the tenderness of his heart, however, he had no sooner convinced himself that he possessed this power than he began to reproach himself for

having used it; proud as she was, Eleanour would willingly have been the object of his pity if she had known how that pity softened all his feelings towards her.

"While I grieve for my past negligence of a lost friend, I am preparing for myself a similarly bitter grief should anything befall another. Have I so many friends that I can afford to sport with them in this manner?" he asked himself.

The next evening he went to Mr. Narpenth's house. He was immediately admitted and cordially welcomed. Miss Narpenth's toilette and a remark of Mrs. Lister's betrayed the fact that she had an engagement for that night; but Mr. Narpenth, glad of an excuse to stay at home, had evident satisfaction in complying with a suggestion of his daughter's, and sending word that the carriage would not be wanted. Wilfred remained till a late hour; and when

he took leave he had promised to return next morning—to resume the interrupted reading of his poem, and to see Miss Narpenth's now finished picture.

To what was all this to lead? Did he ask himself?

No! he was far too worldly-wise.

That next morning proved the first of many mornings which Wilfred and Eleanour spent together. Such writing as Wilfred did now was best done at night, and his definite day's work seemed to consist in visiting Miss Narpenth.

He could not but observe that Eleanour was changed. She was not, as formerly, ready of speech; she rarely said anything in praise of what he read; the flattery she bestowed upon him was the dangerous flattery of soft silences and of soft glances. Her whole nature seemed to be softened and subdued. There was

sometimes an exquisite timidity in her manner towards Wilfred, which was in itself the most subtle flattery; the timidity of that self-distrust which is born of intense desire to please. It was but rarely that a flash of the old impatience betrayed anything of the passion smouldering within; yet now and then there were such flashes, and they ought, and her silence and softness ought, to have served as warnings to Wilfred—warnings of how dangerously near to the lava flood and the heart of fire his careless feet were straying.

On the morning when Wilfred had finished the reading of his poem—and this was not till they had passed many mornings together—he said, breaking a silence which had lasted rather long:—

"Reading this, which was written so long ago, has been something like holding spiritual communion with a lost friend,

who was not valued enough while he was possessed. The power that enabled me to write this is a thing of the irrevocable past. If this poem is ever published it ought to be as a posthumous work, for the nature that produced it is no longer mine."

Miss Narpenth threw down her brushes and palette with a hasty gesture; her cheek flamed, she sank back in her chair, and appeared to struggle to maintain her self-control.

Wilfred continued dreamily, speaking as much to himself as to her—

"It is sad to look back upon a past self which—though it was saddened by strivings after things unattainable—one feels to have been truer to the highest possibilities of being than is one's present self. If, however, what we are and do under the influence of a human nature purer, clearer, and higher than our own, should be ascribed,

not to ourselves, but to the elevating influence of that nature—and I think we should look at the matter thus—then this poem, for which I entertain a love and an esteem with which nothing else I have done has ever inspired me, is not my work, but that of my guardian angel."

He looked towards Eleanour with a half smile as he said the last words. Her face was averted and covered by her hand; she did not turn to meet his smile; a sound very like a sob of suppressed but passionate weeping broke the silence that followed.

Much shocked, he approached her and tried to take her other hand.

"You are weeping, Eleanour! Have *I* pained you? Dear friend, tell me, what have I done or said to wound you?"

Folding her hands that he might not touch them, she revealed her glowing face and flashing eyes.

"I am weary of bearing it!" she cried. "You pain me and wound me every hour, and you care for me so little that you do not even know it. I am weary of suffering in silence. You call me 'dear friend,' and yet you speak constantly as if all your life were left behind—as if the present were nothing to you—as if the future could be nothing to you. What is it in the past that you regret so much? Am I, is my friendship, quite valueless? It seems so. Why do you not leave me then? Oh, why did you save me from a death that would have spared me all this cruel suffering?"

Her vehemence overwhelmed Wilfred. He stood beside her silent and bewildered.

It was not till she had long finished speaking—till a great burst of weeping had wearied her to quietness, and she laid her cheek down upon the arm of her chair,

ceasing even to sob—that he spoke; spoke gently and gravely, as one who reproves a wilful child.

"You must know that you are unjust, Eleanour: you must know that I do value your friendship—that it is very precious to me—the only sweet and pleasant thing in my life. If I feel that I have already outlived the prime of my powers, and regret that I used them so little and so unwisely—if I feel that the best years of my life are left behind, and regret that I did not value them while they were mine—if I now despair of ever knowing such happiness as I believed in when I was younger, is this not cause enough for sadness? Ought you not to pity, instead of blaming me?"

"It is not so!" she cried, with reviving passion—"You have not outlived your best powers or the possibility of happiness. I will not bear that you should say you have!

You are blind, weak, morbid! When you talk in this way, like a lovesick girl, you are unmanly and—contemptible."

Wilfred drew back from her with an air of cold displeasure; taking up his hat and gloves he moved towards the door — unused to such scenes—unused to the caprices of a wayward, stormy-tempered woman—possessing no key to Miss Narpenth's conduct—he felt both perplexed and disgusted—humiliated for himself, and for her.

Eleanour started up when she saw him about to leave her; she clasped her hands over his arm, and, gazing at him imploringly, cried,

"Have I insulted you? I did not know what I said. Forgive me; do not leave me in anger, unless you wish to kill me!"

"I am not angry. It was for your sake that I was about to leave you. When you are calm you will be the first to regret this scene."

"Oh, no! You are not angry—you are too cold even for anger!" As she spoke, she retreated from him.

"Surely I had better go," he said, as he followed her; "every word I utter is so unfortunate as to displease you. Dear Eleanour, be calm and reasonable."

"If you were less calm and reasonable, less icy-cold, I might be more so. You torture me with your coldness and your melancholy. I have borne the torture very long in silence. Now ——."

She could not finish her sentence, but began to weep again, in a gentler and heart-broken manner now.

He took her hand, led her to her chair, and stood by her, retaining her hand in his. When he thought she could hear him, he said—

"I would rather die than give you pain. If I torture you, as you say, this had

better be our last meeting—though to think that it must be so would grieve me inexpressibly. Tell me plainly of my faults towards you; and, believe me, I shall be anxious to amend them; for I would sooner die than give you pain. Yet that, perhaps, you will think, is not saying much. I own that is not saying much. Shall I say I would rather live without the sweetness of your friendship than give you pain?"

He was no longer calm—strange emotions thronged upon him. As he looked down upon the hand lying in his, he thought what a kind hand it had been for him—what a dreary blank would be made in his life if he might never touch that hand again. Thinking this, he stooped and pressed his lips upon it. There was warmth and passion in their touch. Thrilled with sudden joy, Eleanour raised her head—she wished to read his face: at the same moment they both

met Mrs. Lister's gaze: it was dark, glittering—even vindictive! She did not retreat, but came close up to Eleanour.

"Your brother, Captain Narpenth, is come; he wishes to see you at once. Shall he come to you here?"

The question sounded something like a threat. Wilfred dropped Eleanour's hand, and a disagreeable sensation stole over him. Eleanour rose; stood a moment irresolute, wavering not only mentally, but physically: then, meeting Mrs. Lister's look, she uttered the one word "serpent!"—and left the room.

Mrs. Lister lingered; she moved about the apartment as if bent upon restoring order, but did very little. Wilfred hardly knew whether to go at once or to remain. He had no wish to meet Captain Narpenth—no wish to appear to avoid him. He felt that his position was awkward.

"Excuse me, Mrs. Lister, but Miss Nar-

penth will not like to have those drawings disarranged," he said gently, when he saw Mrs. Lister about to put away some sketches that Eleanour was using.

Mrs. Lister dropped the drawings. She looked mournfully at Wilfred as she said:—

"You seem at home here, Mr. Mason, and well acquainted with Miss Narpenth's wishes."

He took no notice of this remark, but pretended to be intently studying a picture hanging on the wall. Mrs. Lister came close to him; she laid one of her wasted white hands upon his arm—and again some peculiarity of her touch, at once so eager and so tremulous, thrilled through every nerve. She said in a low, hurried voice:—

"I am old enough to be your mother; and, as if I were your mother, I have your happiness at heart. I cannot forget

that I might now have been the mother of such a son. I beg of you to answer me as you would answer your mother; but I will go on my knees to ask you—and no mother should kneel to her own son—do you *love* Eleanour Narpenth?"

Wilfred coloured violently; by a quick, firm movement he hindered her from kneeling. When he spoke it was with cold dignity, and in a constrained voice:—

"Mrs Lister will be the first to feel the impropriety of such a question—the impossibility of my answering such a question, either negatively or affirmatively. She will be the first to feel that such a use of Miss Narpenth's name is unjustifiable, and an offence against that lady."

"You do not love her!—tell me you do not love her!" The words spoken with the accent of entreating love. "You must not love her! You must not let her make you

believe that she loves you! She cannot love —she has no heart: she is passionate, but she is cold, selfish, obstinate, weak, fickle—I would rather see her in her grave than see your life wrecked upon her. You must not love her! I could tell you what would make you despise her as I despise her. I know she is beautiful, but do not let her beauty entrap you—she is not what she seems—she———."

Wilfred made a despairing effort to stop this torrent of feverish speech; but Mrs. Lister paid no heed to his warning gesture. He stood facing the door, while she faced him—he saw Miss Narpenth enter the room —saw her pause in the middle of it—saw her face grow livid and her eyes dilate. It was not till he said—"Miss Narpenth is here," that Mrs. Lister ceased to speak—then she turned, and the two women stood face to face. Which looked the more

haughtily majestic, the more defiant, it would have been difficult to decide. There was nothing like shame or confusion in Mrs. Lister's mien—it was more that of a noble, wild creature brought to bay, than of one woman detected in treachery and falsehood against another.

During the silence that ensued the atmosphere oppressed Wilfred—it seemed like the sultry, sullen quiet that precedes the breaking of a storm.

Eleanour's words—"After what has happened, Mrs. Lister, you will not, I am sure, desire to remain longer in this house," seemed to Wilfred—who was ignorant of all that would have enabled him to judge justly between the two women, and incensed by what he thought the uncalled-for virulence of Mrs. Lister, and at the awkwardness of the position in which she had placed him—grandly simple and forbearing. After speak-

ing them Eleanour turned to him and said:—

"I came back just for a moment, Mr. Mason, to apologize for my abrupt departure, and for anything else in my conduct that may have offended you. I find that Captain Narpenth intends spending some days with us. I fear, therefore, that during these days my mornings will be engaged; but I hope—and I know that my father will hope—that you will give us all your disengaged evenings."

She held out her hand, adding—

"Think kindly of me whatever happens—do not be ready to believe anything that is said against me—at least give me a chance of defending myself."

Wilfred pressed her hand and looked kindly into her beseeching eyes. Then, bowing to Mrs. Lister, who made a half movement to detain him, he left the room

and the house, quite bewildered by the various emotions of that morning—wondering what on earth he had done that he should be thus played upon by these two women.

He pondered over Eleanour's conduct and Mrs. Lister's strange and impassioned appeal till his brain seemed to whirl, and he tried to banish all these things from his thoughts together. The whole scene had been like part of an uneasy dream; the more especially as he had played but a poor and passive part.

CHAPTER VII.

"L'Amour n'a qu'un ennemi sérieux, c'est le ridicule. Quand l'Amour survit au ridicule c'est qu'il est sublime."

Mr. Narpenth and his son and daughter met at the dinner-table. Mrs. Lister did not appear, but no remark was made upon her absence until the servants had left the room; then Mr. Narpenth said:—

"Mrs. Lister has one of her headaches, I suppose?"

"Not that I am aware of," Eleanour replied.

"Eh? Mrs. Lister! Why doesn't she come down?" Captain Narpenth asked,

peering at his sister with his small, short-sighted, and now malicious, eyes.

"Mrs. Lister, in accordance with my wish and her own, has left this house; I do not think that she is likely ever to return to it."

Eleanour looked fixedly at Captain Narpenth as she spoke.

"What did you say, my dear?" her father asked.

She repeated her words, adding:—

"When we are alone, papa, I will explain all the circumstances to you."

Captain Narpenth, who had looked blank for a few seconds, now smiled meaningly.

"I think you did foolishly to part so hastily with such a handsome and accomplished person as Mrs. Lister; but probably she was too handsome and accomplished," he said. "I can assure you, however, that you will not gain anything

by this move of yours," he added, in a low, menacing tone.

"I am obliged to you for that assurance: also for the high motives to which you attribute my conduct."

"Eleanour, my dear, what is it? There seems to be some misunderstanding between you and your brother."

"I think, papa, that *you* will find it difficult to understand what good purpose can have been served by the carrying on of a secret correspondence between Mrs. Lister and Captain Narpenth, of which Mr. Mason has been the subject."

"A correspondence between you and Mrs. Lister, Edgar!"

"Yes, sir, if a simple exchange of notes deserves to be so called—a correspondence concerning an adventurer, calling himself Wilfred Mason, of whose antecedents Mrs. Lister knows something which she is not at

liberty to reveal, and who, to her dismay, has gained a footing in this house. Believing that your infatuation for this fellow almost equalled Miss Narpenth's, and would make any appeal to you futile, did Mrs. Lister do anything extraordinary in apprising me of the danger threatening the honour of our family? Was it so very strange to appeal to a brother to come to the aid of his sister?"

Eleanour listened with a perceptible sneer; seeing which, he added—

"If you doubt my brotherly affection, Miss Narpenth, you do not perhaps doubt my sincerity when I say that I am not prepared to see a daughter of *my* mother's husband disgrace her family; whatever *your* mother's daughter may be prepared to do."

There was no need for Eleanour to speak: she looked at her father, and saw that there was no need.

"Unless you desire that I should order you from this room and from my house, control your tongue, Captain Narpenth. Your mother's son, whatever else he is, should be too much of a gentleman to make any reflections upon a dead wife and mother in the presence of her husband and child." Mr. Narpenth had risen, and was pacing the room excitedly; he continued:—"I do not know whether most to admire or to resent your consummate impudence! *You* to talk of the honour of this family, of any family of which you are a member! And so your last achievement is to enter into a clandestine correspondence with a lady in my employ, the object of which is to blacken the character of one of my most intimate and valued friends—of a man who saved your sister's life at the peril of his own, and whose talents and character claim for

him the respect of all who know him!"

Eleanour's eyes shone upon her father, large with gratitude and pleasure—she rose, went to him, and passed her arm through his.

"The fellow is an impostor—a nameless nobody—the name by which you know him, plebeian as it is, is not his own."

"Make Captain Narpenth prove his words, papa. It is very soldier-like and noble to deal in such vague calumnies, but make him prove his words."

"Can you prove your words, sir? Can you substantiate your accusations? Otherwise they are cowardly, cruel, and base. Can you prove your words?"

"No, the deuce take it, I can't."

The sullen frankness of this answer sent some vague alarm into Eleanour's heart. This did not appear to be shared by her father, or to escape her brother.

"Then what excuse can you offer for your ungentlemanly language and conduct? What excuse that shall cause me to suffer you to remain in this house?" his father demanded.

"Curse it all! That girl knows that there is truth in what I say. I can see by her face that she does. The Lister knew all—and the all was too much—about this favourite of yours; and that is why your artless child shipped her off."

"Mrs. Lister left as much at her own wish as at mine: moreover, before she left, she owned that she felt humiliated at having been tempted to try and gain her end in an underhand way, by connivance with you. You have disgusted your ally by the tone of coarse familiarity you assumed towards her: she voluntarily gave me her word that she would keep Captain Narpenth in ignorance of her address, and make further correspondence impossible.

Mrs. Lister is, for some reason, my enemy—but she is naturally noble, and I trust her!"

Captain Narpenth could not disguise the uneasiness this information gave him—he broke into an insulting laugh.

"Eleanour has shown us the peculiarity of her taste before," he said; "but do you, sir, mean to say that if this low, beggarly, literally nameless scribbler—this unscrupulous adventurer—should ask you for the hand of your daughter and heiress, *and for her money* (he won't forget the latter), you will give them to him?"

"There has been no question of any such matter. You feel yourself very much in the wrong, and you are shifting your ground. You had better ask your sister's pardon for your rudeness, and drop the subject."

"Well! if there is nothing between them there is no harm done—only I have warned

you now. I was a fool to lose my temper and waste my time: but I confess that to hear what I have heard of this 'Mason,' and then to hear Eleanour's name coupled with his alias, did make my blood boil!"

"I am obliged to you for thinking that your old father was getting so soft and foolish as to make it advisable that *you* should become your sister's guardian! It is highly probable, however, that I know far more of Mr. Wilfred Mason's 'antecedents' than you do, son! I know that he was a ward of my old acquaintance Ireton: I know that he has been on terms of intimacy with the Southerns of Beech Holmes. I take care to know something of those whom I receive as my guests; but I am not an advocate for close and curious prying into the secrets of a man's birth. If I find a man honourable in himself, and worthy of esteem, I ——"

"You would accept him as a son-in-law even if you knew—what shall we say?—well, that his father was a convict, and his mother ——."

"Be silent!" cried Mr. Narpenth. Eleanour's cheek had blanched, and now burnt. "Be silent, or, when your sister has left us, I will favour you with a page of family history that will lower your crest a little. You are talking like an idle coward; no man has a right, by his random words, to cast the shadow of a shadow upon another's good name."

"If Mrs. Lister had been younger I might have ascribed her conduct to jealousy, and might have paid little heed to it; as it is, upon my soul I believe there is some shameful mystery about the fellow. However, Eleanour, I beg your pardon for having fancied that what or who he is could nearly concern you; in this, at least,

I will believe that Mrs. Lister deceived herself and misled me. You are past the romantic age now, and if you marry you will choose wisely. Do you remember that foreign fellow, an artist, wasn't he?—the fellow with the splendid beard, about whom you were so desperate?—proposed to elope with him, didn't you? You know that you have never forgiven me for spoiling that little game. Now, of course, you are too sensible and too ambitious for that kind of thing—have no idea of making yourself a laughing-stock by marrying a nameless scribbler with objectionable connections. But remember, Eleanour, that the world doesn't believe in Platonic friendship—if your sentimental flirtation is not ended by a romantic marriage the world is quite as likely to believe that Miss Narpenth has been jilted, or slighted, as that she

was wise enough to go just so far and no further."

Mr. Narpenth, who had resumed his seat and was sipping his wine, deceived by the pacific tone of this speech, did not observe how studiously insulting it really was; but he made Eleanour's retreat a triumph by calling after her:—

"If you have no engagement for to-morrow, Eleanour, send a note to Mason and ask him to dine here then, to meet your brother."

CHAPTER VIII.

"By passion blinded and foul envy led,
 Working and walking in beclouded night,
He but brings vengeance down on his own head,
 And makes his victim's virtues shine more bright."

CAPTAIN NARPENTH had the satisfaction of knowing that his interference had brought him into deeper disfavour with his father and sister, and had rather benefited than damaged Mr. Mason's cause—if, indeed, Mr. Mason had any cause to be advanced or retarded; this he would have begun to doubt after seeing something of Wilfred, had he not come to the conclusion that

it was his presence which caused the love-making to be so cold and cautious.

As a prodigal son, and the son of a mother between whom and her husband there had never been any real love—though, at the beginning of their married life, there had been reasonable affection and tolerant kindness on Mr. Narpenth's side—he had not at any time possessed much influence with his father, and what he had possessed he had lost now by having abused it. The mother, in whose aristocratic connections he put his trust, and of whom he made his boast, had been one of a large and needy family; her marriage had been a result of their neediness, and after it she had not scrupled to manifest her scorn of her husband's pursuits and of his relations; having made a few years of his life miserable, she died while still young, leaving but one child.

Within a short time Mr. Narpenth married Eleanour's mother—a humbly-born girl—the love of his youth, from whom the machinations of his first wife's relations had separated him; and who had since become heiress to a large fortune.

To prove his disinterestedness, he settled this upon her and her children. Eleanour, the latest born, had alone survived infancy. The second wife also died comparatively young, and her little daughter, then five years old, became her father's idol.

The prodigal son was an often repentant, as often forgiven, and as often sinning again, prodigal, for whom it was impossible that his father should retain any respect or much affection; and whose treatment of his half-sister—towards whom his feelings were those of unmixed jealousy and dislike—was a constant source of pain and annoyance to his father.

It is quite true that Eleanour did nothing to propitiate her brother—hers was not a conciliatory nature; she had despised Captain Narpenth ever since she had been old enough to appreciate his character; and on one occasion he had, she thought, given her cause to hate him. For his conduct then she could, perhaps, have forgiven him now; but she could not forgive his present interference, or his reference to that past transaction.

Wilfred came to dine the next day, and several other days while Captain Narpenth stayed at his father's house. That gentleman's visit extended over several weeks; for he hoped that his presence was some restraint upon Mason and his sister, and he knew that it caused the latter great annoyance. He also hoped that something might "turn up" to Mason's disadvantage; or that something might be heard of "the Lister,"

whom he considered "too plucky to give up her game so easily."

When the young men met, Captain Narpenth's constant endeavour appeared to be to discover and to hold up to ridicule weaknesses or peculiarities of Mason's; at the same time that he treated him with a marked respect, an excessive deference and consideration which he wished should be taken as ironical.

Wilfred, however, was on his guard, and his cold and polished reserve successfully repelled the not very skilful or subtle attacks of his enemy.

If the Captain ventured to enter the lists of argument with Wilfred he generally lost his temper; while his opponent invariably maintained the most unruffled courtesy. He always exposed the superficiality of his knowledge on some subjects, and the profoundness of his ignorance on others;

while his adversary defeated him without effort, without deigning to bring any formidable weapons to bear upon so puny an enemy.

Eleanour's triumph in the success of her hero was, on these occasions, as quiet as it was deep. A smile for one and a smile for the other of the opponents was all she used — in the difference of these smiles dwelt their sting and their honey.

By the time he took his leave Captain Narpenth had played his cards so ill—had covered himself with confusion, and, by force of contrast, shown Wilfred in such an admirable light—that Eleanour felt quite kindly towards him. It is true that he had done something—for his observations had opened Mr. Narpenth's eyes to a probability which had not occurred to him before—and which he had seen nothing in Wilfred's demeanour to suggest—the

probability that Wilfred might some day become a suitor for Eleanour's hand. But this probability seemed a dim and distant one. His admiration and esteem for Wilfred had lately ripened into positive affection; and he never forgot the obligation he lay under to a man who had saved his child's life: still, it cannot be said that he had any pleasure in the contemplation of this probability. Nevertheless—implicitly relying upon Wilfred's honour and upon Eleanour's discretion—he resolved not to trouble himself about "the young people's affairs," but to let things take their course.

"Eleanour is no child now; she was thwarted once, and suffered a good deal. I shall not feel justified in crossing her will again for any light cause," he thought. "The connection may not offer all the advantages that I could wish; time enough to think of that, however—

for I am not at all sure that either Mason or Eleanour has any thought of love or marriage. It's no use anticipating troubles that may never come."

Mrs. Lister, whatever she had failed to do, had succeeded in throwing an apple of discord among Wilfred's thoughts and feelings. While Captain Narpenth made one of the family he did not think it in accordance with his dignity to avoid visiting the house; but after the Captain left Wilfred's visits became few, far between, and comparatively formal. He sometimes questioned whether he ought not to leave the neighbourhood and altogether break off an intercourse which was "the only pleasure of his life;" but Mrs. Lister had seemed rather to deny than to assert that Eleanour loved him — to accuse her of coquetry and heartlessness towards him, rather than to intimate that he

might be acting unworthily towards her, and that he might peril her happiness and endanger her peace.

Wilfred had none of the coxcombry and conceit which would have made many other men ready to believe that Miss Narpenth's heart was likely to be in danger from their attractions. She valued him — perhaps she over-valued and too tenderly valued him—as a friend; but of love, he told himself, there was no question between them; and to a friendship which, however dear and near it might be, did not tend towards a closer connection, there could, he strove to be convinced, be no objection.

This friendship had not been of his seeking: from the beginning it had been forced upon him by circumstances. He told himself that there would be indelicacy, presumption and ingratitude in

giving up a friend, only from fear that she might grow too fond.

Wilfred blushed as he soliloquized, and felt as if the momentary entertainment of such a thought were an insult to Miss Narpenth. As to his own heart, he did not believe that was in the slightest danger. It is true that his brain seemed to whirl, and the world to stand still for him, when he said to himself those simple words, "If she loves me;" but then that was only because to think of any woman as loving him with "the love of men and women when they love the best" was to plunge into a profound depth of delicious unreality; in which what he had only dreamed of as vaguely possible in the far distance was contemplated as present and actual.

The result of his reflections and bewildering speculations was, that he decided

not to give up visiting at Mr. Narpenth's; but to do so less frequently, and only of an evening.

It was the more easy to him to make and to keep this resolution, because the excitement and agitation to which he had lately been subject having thoroughly roused him from his listless gloom of unproductiveness, he had begun to write again—not for his taskmasters, and in the service of Mammon, but for himself—to give expression to thoughts and feelings that pressed for utterance. Becoming deeply interested in his work, and his faith in himself to some extent reviving in consequence, he saw even less of Eleanour than he had intended, and thought of her less, far less, than he could have believed possible.

CHAPTER IX.

"But—I love you, Sir,
And when a woman says she loves a man,
The man must hear her, though he love her not."

ELEANOUR NARPENTH, with all her accomplishments, was a woman with no variety of inward resource; with all her apparent independance she had no real self-independence. Wilfred only exercised slight self-restraint, denying himself frequent and intimate intercourse; Eleanour suffered mortally. The many days when he did not come to the house, were blank and dreary as days could be; and when he came his

visits—so short and so formal compared with those he used to pay—left her restless and dissatisfied; some real or fancied coldness or neglect always marred her pleasure while he was present, and left its sting to torment her during the days and nights that elapsed ere he came again. She was miserable there is no doubt, but she made no effort to be otherwise. She knew no one who was capable of interesting her, of satisfying her—heart, intellect, and imagination—as Wilfred had done; the suspension of all their familiar intercourse made a fearful gap in her life.

With others she was conscious of keeping back a part of herself which she believed to be beyond the range of their sympathies — with Wilfred she felt her nature all too narrow to comprehend the whole of his: with others she was conscious of condescension, of stooping to their

level — with Wilfred she felt as if her higher life stood tip-toe and with outstretched arms in effort to reach to and embrace his. How soon she might have wearied of an attitude so foreign to her nature, and so constrained, was a question that did not occur to her now!

When after a time it became necessary to Eleanour's peace, and to the maintenance of what she called her self-respect, that she should believe that she was loved where she loved so much, she sought about for reasons why Wilfred, though loving her, because he loved her should shun her. Brought up to esteem wealth highly, having practically proved its power, not fancying that to anyone it could be a thing simply indifferent, she thought she had found such a reason as she desired when she contrasted Wilfred's poverty with her own wealth. Yes—he was poor and proud, she

thought: he loved her, she was rich; therefore he shunned her—he would try and stifle his love.

Indulged impatience, passion, and grief did their work on Eleanour. When the winter had at last passed, and spring was come, she was looking so ill that her father urged an early visit to Thorndon—to try if country air would restore her roses; but this remedy was little to her taste.

Wilfred had not been to the house for nearly a month when he came in late one evening—"as he happened to be passing." He was pre-occupied, and therefore unobservant; he sat chatting with Mr. Narpenth, and for Eleanour he had hardly a look or a word.

He had lived poorly and had worked hard; consequently he appeared thin and haggard. This was not lost upon Miss Nar-

penth as she sat by, almost unnoticed; lashing herself into the resolve to do something, however desperate, that should end her suffering, and, as she thought, his also.

Implicitly believing all that Wilfred had ever told her, she implied from what had passed between them that she had no rival in his heart. She imagined that he had, perhaps, suffered some love-sorrow—that some girl he had loved was lost to him by death or marriage—and that it was this girl whom he regretted in the past, and of whom he spoke as his guardian-angel. With the selfishness of her passion there mingled an unselfish desire to comfort him she loved for past sorrow and loss—to make him happy—she could hardly have been a woman had she been wholly selfish while she loved.

When Wilfred rose to go Eleanour started visibly, but no one heeded it.

"Do you remember promising to lend me Klingler's Poems, and to show me which of them you thought I should like the best?" she asked, when he stood before her, offering his hand. "No doubt you have forgotten—it was the last time you were here that you spoke of them, and that is so very long ago."

"I am extremely sorry—I had quite forgotten—you shall have the book to-morrow."

"Will *you* bring it?"—the question was asked in a low, tremulous voice, and with downcast eyes.

"Certainly, if you desire it."

"I shall not be at home in the evening," she pursued hurriedly. "May I venture to ask you to come in the morning—or are you too much occupied?"

"Not too much occupied to be at leisure to do you such a slight service, and myself so great a pleasure," Wilfred answered,

pressing the hand that lingered in his—he was touched by the timidity of her manner.

"He will not come," she said a hundred times before morning. "He will forget—he will not come!"

She had hardly closed her eyes when the much-desired morning broke. Breakfast over, her father gone, she sat alone; waiting hour after hour—waiting, waiting.

When, at last, Wilfred's knock came, and she heard his step mounting the stair, a cold and deadly sickness stole over her—all her resolution left her; all she desired then was strength to endure, and to conceal what she endured.

The most careless eyes must have noted her excessive pallor; the blank whiteness of her face, on which the bright light of a fine spring morning shone, absolutely startled Wilfred. His eyes were not careless eyes, could not

be careless for any one who in any way loved him—and last night he had been struck by something peculiar in the tremulous urgency of her manner as she made her request to him.

When he had given her the book, and they had exchanged a few ordinary sentences, he said—

"Does not this mild spring weather try you, spent in town? You are paler and thinner than you used to be—you look ill, Eleanour?" Then, struck by the tenderness of his own tone, he added more carelessly, "You should be in the country. Why are you not at Thorndon? It must be very pleasant there now."

Colour rushed to Eleanour's cheeks, and tears to her eyes; her trembling fingers fluttered among the leaves of the book she held; bending her head over it, she struggled wildly for self-command, desperately

desiring to conceal those very feelings she had meant to betray.

He took the book from her and began to speak of its contents; she tried to listen, and she presently looked up— but it was such a face that she raised to his!

The words died on his lips; pain and pity shone from his eyes with dangerous softness. "Dear Eleanour! you must have been ill, and I did not know it!" he exclaimed in a tone of deepest concern.

She buried her face in the pillows of the couch on which she sat; the flood-gates of her grief were opened by that look and tone—she wept with perfect abandonment. When she ceased to weep she still kept her face concealed: she was afraid to raise it lest she should find that she was alone—that he had fled before her tears.

Meanwhile Wilfred, standing by, felt a very fool—alike afraid to stay or to go, to speak or to remain silent—a fool, and a miserable fool!

At last Eleanour lifted up her head—her face was not disfigured by her tears—it looked cleared, lightened, and tenderly beautified, as if she had wept her heart out and had gained ease.

"Forgive me—I was so very miserable," she said humbly.

He threw himself down upon the couch beside her and took one of her pale hands in his.

"You are miserable, Eleanour!—you suffer!" he began impetuously, then suddenly grew silent.

"You had better leave me; I know you are very kind, but you had better leave me."

She leant back among the pillows, speaking

with weary sadness and without lifting her eyes.

"I will not leave you!—my inmost heart aches for you, Eleanour! Tell me what it is that makes you miserable!"

She raised her lids for a moment, and the light of her languid eyes shone on him; then she drooped them again.

"You had better leave me!" she repeated. "You had better not question me—there is no reason why you should share my grief; why you should be burdened by my suffering."

"There is reason, if we are friends. I must know, and I will know why you suffer, Eleanour! You must speak to me—you must tell me the whole truth."

He had given himself up now; he let the impulse of the moment rule him.

"If you value your peace, leave me—you do not love me—leave me!"

He seized her other hand; he held them both firmly, and gazed into her face—her face that was beautiful in its agitation, as each heart-beat swept some fresh wave of change over it.

"This will not do—you shall not play with me thus," he said. "You have gone too far to retreat now. Who says that I do not love you? Eleanour!—you shall speak, you shall speak truth."

"Do you think it manly to extort confession thus?" she said, seeking refuge in a show of anger.

Her eyes, surrounded by their dark circles, seemed to burn in her pale face. His face was hardly less pale.

"Manly or not manly, I will have confession! I will know the truth!" he said in desperate earnestness.

"You *will* know the truth?" she demanded threateningly.

"I *will.*"

He held her hands more firmly yet; though she struggled to remove them, that with them she might hide her face.

"Then you shall know it. It is this —I love you!"

Simplicity and tragic truth gave grandeur to the words, and to her mien as she uttered them.

He suddenly released her hands, as if their touch stung him; she flung herself from him, burying her face in the pillows again as she waited for her sentence.

A heavy silence followed, during which they both heard the first heavy drops of a spring shower strike sharply against the window panes. A heavy sigh, heaved by Wilfred as his heart began to beat again, was the first sound that broke that ominous silence.

The silence and the sigh were sentence

enough for Eleanour. She felt that she had staked her all, and had lost that all. Despair lent her both dignity and strength. She rose: keeping her face turned from Wilfred she said:—

"Do not speak to me! Your gentlest words would goad me to madness. I know what I have done, and how you must regard me. Do not try to see me again—pass entirely out of my life. If I can I will bear my life—if not, I will die. Do not speak to me!—do not touch me! Let me go while I can, lest I should further humiliate myself. Let me go, sir, I command!"

Her voice grew sharp and shrill; she snatched away the hand Wilfred had taken, and seemed to grope, rather than to see, her way from the room.

"Let her go!" Wilfred's good genius cried. "Let her go—so best for her and for you—let her go!"

He stood as if rooted to the ground, looking after her. His heart ached for her miserably—she seemed to him noble in her love and her despair. His soul was weak with pain, tenderness, and compassion: that he did not love so beautiful, so passionate a woman, he did not believe; she must not leave him for ever, believing what was, what must be false; she must not through all her life to come bear the sting and bitterness of love contemned.

His cry of "Eleanour, Eleanour!" seemed to burst from the depths of his soul without exercise of his will.

Hearing it she paused and faltered—he sprang to her side, and she sank into his arms.

"It is not as you think!" he said. "Dear noble girl, who could help loving you? You must hear me!"

He led her back to her former seat. There was a short silence—she was weary and faint, she leant against him, overcome by joy. He was not calm enough to speak directly. But when she lifted her face to his, and he saw the soft ecstasy of love that was over it, his conscience smote him, and he spoke.

"Eleanour!—what have I done? Why do you love me who must accept no woman's love? We must part, and we must both learn to forget; through all my life I will thank you for this brief rapture, and I will reverence you in my inmost heart. But we must part to-day, and forget what has passed between us. You do not know whom you love—that I am a beggar is nothing to your love; but there is more——"

"Have you already a wife?"

"No."

"Have you promised to marry any other woman?"

"No."

"Do you love any other woman?"

"Again no."

"Then you are mine."

"It cannot be: I may not marry you. We must part to-day and for ever—it had better be now. This first kiss, of reverent and tender gratitude, must be the last I ever set upon your lips."

She let him kiss her—she let her head rest on his shoulder.

"You can tell me nothing that shall part us," she said, looking into his face. "I love you, you just as you are—whatever your name may be—whatever your birth may be—I love you!"

It was the sublime of love or the utmost abandonment of passion which dictated the words she said—to Wilfred it seemed to be the first.

"Love chooses the noblest for his martyrs, Eleanour," he answered, inclined to kneel at her feet. "The devotion of a life could not repay you for this love, and the best I can do for you is to leave you! This is cruel, cruel; but it must be so! I can *tell* you nothing that should part us! It is my ignorance that must part us. The name you know me by was given me in mercy, that I might not be *branded* by bearing my father's name: what that is—what was his crime, I do not know."

"This is nothing to me," she persisted. "You saved my life—my whole life is yours; I have no life apart from you. Just now, when I thought you did not love me, I knew that I should die! If you leave me now, you kill me."

A cold spirit-breath chilled Wilfred's cheek.

"If this is so, a higher Judge has

judged. If your father gives you to me I will give myself to you," he said.

"I know that my father will not cross my will," she answered.

Even when a soft, warm cheek was pressed against his own—when Eleanour was in his arms—that same cold spirit-breath now and again chilled the cheek against which hers pressed, and curdled the blood around the heart upon which she rested. Tears, kisses, smiles and sighs—abandonment to each passing emotion—made the scene wonderfully like that of betrothal; but a sense of unreality was over Wilfred. As twilight deepened, that twilight seemed eerie; he could almost have believed that the clinging arms round him were not the arms of a mortal maiden, but of some Syren, or some hostile Fate. And Eleanour's words, when she repeated, "You are mine, I yours, for ever!" sounded weird and mocking.

"For as long as you love me I am yours," he said, trying, by a jesting tone, to break the dreamy spell.

"For ever then!"

"That time will prove!"

"Mocker! Do you think that I shall repent my choice, or that my love will change?"

"Search your heart and soul, before we meet again," he said—growing suddenly grave—"I may bring you pain and shame as well as poverty. Is your choice irrevocable?"

"Do you think that I could have acted as I have done to-day, moved by caprice or by a fancy that will pass? You wish to make me angry—you little know what agony I suffered before I spoke."

"Dear love, I will strive never to forget that agony suffered for me. But, Eleanour, I am a coward and sore afraid. I

have lived alone always; to myself, and by myself—it is a very solemn thing to link another life to such a life as mine. If I should not be what you expect—if I should not make you happy?"

"Then I will be unhappy, if that be possible, with you."

She pressed his hand to her heart and then to her lips, saying, as she did so:—

"How often have I longed to kiss this dear hand—this dear, delicate, womanish hand."

His nature, perhaps the more feminine of the two, shrank somewhat from her demonstrativeness, and yet it touched his heart and humbled it.

"I will speak first to my father," she said, by-and-by; "and as he will be home soon perhaps my dear lord and master should go now."

"As you will, dearest. I do not

know whether it is more strange or sweet to have the right to use fond words," he added, dreamily.

When Wilfred had left her, and Eleanour sat alone in the deepening darkness, for a time she remained sunk in a stupor of happiness: only for a time—then troublesome thoughts arose.

"Good God! will he not some day despise me for this?" she cried, and her cheeks flamed as she spoke. "But I have won him! I have won him—and I am happy! Have I so surely won him, though?" she questioned, growing chill the while. "Did he once say that he loved me? I cannot remember that he did. Was he not ever and anon sad and silent? Have I done well? I know I could not have lived without him, but—I might have died. I have won him though—I have won him—and I will be happy!"

CHAPTER X.

"Zwischen Sinnenglück und Seelenfrieden,
Bleibt dem Menschen nur die bange Wahl."

WILFRED walked about the streets till late into the night, taking very little heed where he went. He had a feeling that he was not himself—that a new and unfamiliar spirit was clothed with his flesh and pervaded by his consciousness. That he, Wilfred Mason, should have left Mr. Narpenth's house engaged to Mr. Narpenth's daughter—he, Wilfred Mason, who believed that he had no right to seek the love of any woman—did not seem to him possible.

Hunger and fatigue at last drove him to his lodging. He felt something like surprise at finding everything as he had left it. There were his books—many sheets of manuscript strewed the floor—while on the table lay the half-written page, and the pen which he had thrown down reluctantly when he had remembered his promise to Eleanour.

He forgot to take any food—indeed, his hunger had left him by this time; throwiug himself into the chair from which he had risen not many hours before—with no expectation of the changed prospects that would be his before he rested there again—he folded his arms upon his unfinished work, bent his head down upon his arms, and strove to calm the fever of his blood, to still the tumultuous beating of his heart and brain, that he might think.

By-and-by he fell asleep. He passed

the night thus; in uneasy slumber, visited by the wildest of visions. In the morning he looked like a spectre-bridegroom.

After breakfasting, and paying some attention to his toilette, he proceeded to Mr. Narpenth's office; wishing to have an interview with him there before seeing Eleanour again.

"The man is mad if he does not refuse to give his daughter to me," he kept repeating as he walked.

By the bright light of a sunny morning Wilfred felt more than ever incredulous of his position, of his being in reality Miss Narpenth's accepted lover. Perhaps it was this incredulity which—more than anything else—prevented him from strictly and curiously examining his own feelings towards Eleanour.

Believing that he trod the brink of a gulph of separation—expecting to fall

headlong into an abyss of pain—her pain and his—he felt warmly and tenderly towards Eleanour. Her love for him struck him as wonderful and heroic. Regarding it as that true love of which is born self-abnegation, it gave her dignity in his eyes; instead of degrading her in them, as it must have done had he regarded it as lawless passion, seeking its own gratification with an abandonment that cast out womanly fear and swept away womanly pride—being unto itself a fear and pride.

Wilfred did not find Mr. Narpenth at his office—a message had been received there to say that probably he would not be there that morning. Convinced that he was waiting at home on his account Wilfred, against his wish, proceeded to his private house.

"Miss Narpenth is in the drawing-room, sir," the servant said with the friendliest of

smiles, without waiting for Wilfred to speak.

"I wish to see Mr. Narpenth alone."

On this he was ushered into the library, which opened from the entrance hall, and here Mr. Narpenth came to him almost immediately. Holding out his hand with a kindly, though grave, smile, he said:—

"I have been expecting you—Eleanour has spoken to me. So you want my daughter—my only daughter. I will not deny that I should have been better pleased had you spoken to me first."

"I wish to explain my circumstances. I fear that it will seem to you that my explanation should have come earlier. I feel myself placed in a position both awkward and humiliating. I trust you will believe that if I was guilty of indiscretion yesterday the indiscretion was not premeditated." All this Wilfred said very nervously.

"I am not in the least inclined to judge you severely. Eleanour has been frank with me—any indiscretion committed was hers: she is impulsive—she has loved you for some months: her feelings carried her away—she betrayed the nature of them to you. Was it not so?"

"It was like her—it was generous and noble—to vindicate me at her own cost. It is not my utter want of fortune, or of any prospects for the future, that complicates my position so painfully—it is that——"

"Come, come!" Mr. Narpenth said reassuringly, seeing that Wilfred was greatly agitated. "I am not going to play the tyrant. I know there is some slight mystery about your name or birth—what is it? I will not prove unworthy of your confidence. I do not mean to pretend that you are all I could have wished

in my son-in-law; but you have my warm esteem—I entertain an almost fatherly affection for you—and Eleanour's happiness is at stake. You may imagine, therefore, that molehills will not appear to me as mountains."

In few words Wilfred told all he knew, and much that he had feared and imagined, not forgetting to repeat what Mr. Ireton had said—"that he had not *branded* him with his father's name."

"All this being as it is, you will see how well I have requited your kindness by winning your daughter's heart!"

He smiled bitterly as he finished speaking, for the hardness of his fate came upon him with new force.

Mr. Narpenth's brow had clouded over; he was silent for some moments, alternately gazing thoughtfully from the window and as thoughtfully into the young man's sad and proud but honest face. Then he said,

"It must be possible to learn more. Have I your leave to apply to your former guardian—who is no stranger to me—for information?"

"It will be in vain. When he dies I shall know all—from a letter left by my mother which I must not open in his lifetime. Any application to him will, I know, be vain."

"He is not a very old man—we may have long to wait, if we wait for his death. Surely he would let circumstances move him to an explanation."

"He is a man of iron, at least I always found him so—and I believe he is bound by a promise."

Mr. Narpenth was greatly harassed and perplexed. He felt that he might say to Wilfred, "See my daughter no more," and depend upon being obeyed; but of Eleanour he was afraid—from her he had no reason

to hope for implicit obedience. Naturally of a sanguine temperament, he resolved to temporize, to wait, and to hope for the best. "I shall write to the man of iron," he said, cheerfully; "you and Eleanour can wait awhile. Meanwhile I, on my side, have explanations and an offer to make. I am looked upon as wealthy, but this is a mistake; my son's extravagance has been a constant drain upon me. At my death I shall leave Eleanour little or nothing. Her mother's fortune, which is settled upon her, is handsome; but Eleanour's tastes are expensive, and I feel sure that you are not a man who will like to be quite dependent upon a wife's fortune. If my son had been working with me all the years that he has been wasting my substance my position would now be very different. I want some one whose interests are mine to work with me and for me. Your profession is

a precarious one; I have heard you speak as if it did not satisfy you—are you inclined to take a post now vacant in my Bank, the filling which will be a preliminary to your becoming a partner, after a time—and in the event of your marrying my daughter?"

"Your kindness really overwhelms me," Wilfred said, grasping Mr. Narpenth's hand. "It is true, I had grown dissatisfied with my profession; or rather with myself for having made literature a bread-winning profession. Many times I have been on the point of asking advice and assistance from you. May I take time to reflect on your offer? Have you considered my probable want of all qualifications for business? Could I really become a banker?"

The question was put with a naïve incredulity that made Mr. Narpenth smile.

"There is no mysterious initiation re-

quired, Mason," he said. "As a boy you were clever at figures. You are surprised that I know that? A long time back Ireton wrote to me about a youth who had been brought up in his house, for whom he wished to obtain a situation. I have no doubt whatever that you were the young man in question. If you had come to me then, and I was willing to receive you, you might by great good luck be now occupying the position which I offer you to-day; but Eleanour is romantic, and I know that the banker's clerk would not have won her favour, as the poet and novelist has done: there would then have been no prospect of any closer connection between us. Come, Mason, let me see a more hopeful face. I am inclined to think that the view you have taken of your circumstances has been a somewhat morbid one—that your imagination has magnified

its possible disadvantages. I shall write to Ireton by to-night's post; to whatever decision his answer shall bring me I know that you will abide by it. I rely upon your honour implicitly."

Again Wilfred gratefully grasped Mr. Narpenth's hand.

"I will not see your daughter again till I have your leave to do so," he said.

"I promised Eleanour that she should see you to-day; after to-day, do not come here till I have had another talk with you. When I have had Ireton's answer I will ask you to come to me at the Bank."

Wilfred rose; he would willingly have left the house without meeting Eleanour—there was such a tumult of contending feelings within his breast. Bitter, burning pride would have driven him forth, determined never to enter that house again, had it not been kept in check by the belief

that, having imperilled the peace of a woman who loved him, he had forfeited liberty and independence, and become subject to her.

"Decline his offers—maintain your freedom. Let this hour be your last hour in this house—otherwise it will surely become for you a house of bondage; fetters of ease and sloth will hang heavy on your soul, and the twining arms of luxury and flattery will fold you closer and closer!"

So cried one voice.

"But she loves you!—she loves you—and you have given her your word!" urged a subtler conscience.

"You will find Eleanour in the drawing-room," her father said; "I must go now. You will think over my offer, and let me know your decision when we next meet. I will see you as soon as I hear from Ireton."

Wilfred went up to the drawing-room.

Yes! Eleanour was there, and she rose and came to meet him. Her face was pale, her eyes were timid and questioning and looked as if she had wept much; her manner was chastened, subdued to a tender meekness — she looked beautiful and queenly, with a gracious, lovable queenliness.

They met silently. Wilfred took both her hands and looked into her face; her eyes fell, for they were heavy with tears: her attitude was drooping and dejected — that of a penitent.

"This," Wilfred thought, "is the sharply brilliant and keenly satirical Miss Narpenth!—and love for me, and the sorrow of that love, have changed her so!"

The ice of pride, pain, rebellion, and reserve melted suddenly from Wilfred's heart. He drew Eleanour into his arms, kissed her fervently again and again; she grew

radiant beneath the loving light of his eyes, and the loving warmth of his words.

"God reward you for your love, Eleanour—I cannot. Remember, I love you, and I bless you for loving me: remember this, if we never meet again!"

He was gone before she could demand any explanation. All day long she fretted over his words, "If we should never meet again"—instead of dwelling on those other, those longed-for words, "I love you," which had at last been spoken.

The explanation she desired her father gave her. She heard him patiently, but dangerous lightenings played from her eyes. When he had finished speaking, she said:—

"I love him, and he loves me; nothing shall separate us—nothing you hear, and nothing you fail to hear, shall make me give him up! Of this I warn you, father."

Poor Mr. Narpenth sighed wearily. Sitting

alone in his library, late into the night, and musing, he sighed heavily. His son's career threatened to ruin him; he was as a reed in the hands of his self-willed daughter. What had he done that his children thus rose up against him?

CHAPTER XI.

"So komme, was da kommen mag
So lang du lebest, ist es Tag."

Wilfred passed several feverish and uneasy days before a message summoned him to wait upon Mr. Narpenth. When it came, he armed himself with a cold, inflexible demeanour—steeled himself to bear the humiliation of rejection and to give no sign. When he met Mr. Narpenth, however, pity for his evident distress and agitation penetrated his heart and unnerved him. He took the seat offered him, and read the letter placed before him in silence.

This was the letter:—

"DEAR SIR,

"Both for your sake, and because life has long had no value nor ease for me, I regret that my death should not already have put the young man concerning whom you write in possession of a knowledge which it seems he can obtain in no other way. He knows that he cannot obtain it from me—I am bound to silence. My hold of life is, however, precarious; at the worst I may last a few years, at the best perhaps only a few months.

"If the marriage, of which you say there is question, takes place, the most acceptable present an old friend could make the bride would be proof of the demise of her father-in-law. This I cannot obtain; indeed, there is every reason to fear that Wilfred Mason's father still lives.

"Hoping that circumstances may, before

it is too late, put you in possession of the desired information,

"I remain,

"Yours very truly,

"JOHN MASTERS IRETON."

Wilfred drooped his head upon this cruel letter without having spoken one word.

Mr. Narpenth walked up and down his small dark den, suffering hardly less than did the younger man.

Several minutes passed before Wilfred lifted up his head and rose; when he did do so, he looked old, haggard, and inscrutably proud.

"You believe that I did not know it—not that he lives! You need not speak, sir, I prefer to take my answer from your silence. God requite your kindness and Eleanour's love."

They grasped hands, and so parted.

As Wilfred passed along the streets many

people brushed roughly against one so self-absorbed and careless, and he did not heed them; but presently when, at a certain corner, he came into contact with an old man, whose manner and whose dress were those of a broken-down gentleman, and who fixed a pair of evil, twinkling eyes on his, the thought rose in his heart, "This man, or such as this man, may be my father."

A few moments afterwards, in a low by-street which he went through, a hawker was bawling out the life-history of some great criminal, dwelling on revolting details of his crime. This seemed to Wilfred more than he could bear; he stopped his ears and dashed by quickly, lest he should hear what might be the history of his own father—or such a history as his.

He wandered about the city till he became alarmed at the wildness of his own thoughts, and at the feeling that he was

momentarily losing more and more of his self-control. It seemed to him that he must be growing delirious.

"I must have rest, rest." He repeated that one word "rest" again and again. "Rest for my body and rest for my mind. Yes! I want rest—rest—rest!"

Reaching his lodging, he threw himself on the hard, uneasy couch in his sitting-room. He lay there in a half stupor—conscious of being preyed upon by hideous fancies, but too little conscious to have power to rouse himself and try and banish them—till the watery light of an April sunset, reflected from the opposite windows, danced fantastically on the dingy walls. Watching its play upon the ugly and faded paper, he by-and-by fell asleep. It was a heavy sleep and lasted some hours. He woke from it with a sensation of burning thirst, with a painful throbbing in his throat

and head, and also with the feeling that some one—some woman—had been sitting watching by him—had pressed his lips with hers—his hands in hers.

The room was only lighted by the street-lamp just opposite the window; but his first movement convinced him that he was not alone, for the light fell full upon the pale face of some one who crouched beside the couch.

He might have fancied that the white face and glittering eyes were illusions of his fevered imagination; but when he stirred, this woman moved and drew back from him—only a few steps. It was Eleanour Narpenth!

Wilfred rose, trying, by the pressure of his two hands clasped above his head, to still the throbbing of his brain.

"Do I see Miss Narpenth here?" he asked as he let his hands fall again.

"Not that—do not call me that and speak so coldly!"

She approached him—she would have fallen at his feet, but he prevented her, and put her into a chair.

Standing before her, he said:—

"I am ready to attend Miss Narpenth home."

"Do not break my heart!" she cried, taking his hand and clasping it passionately in hers. "Could I help coming to you to-night? I, who will be your wife? To-morrow would, perhaps, have been too late. You might have gone I know not where. I saw that you were ill—suffering. You talked wildly in your sleep—could I help staying by you?"

"Miss Narpenth! I am ready to attend you home."

"Oh, Wilfred, this is cruel! cruel!—and it is no use. You have told me that you

love me—I will belong to you—I will be your wife. I love you with my whole soul —I care nothing for the world!"

"It must be very late I fear, Miss Narpenth—let me see you home without further delay."

"Not till you have promised that you will not give me up."

"I can make no such promise—I will certainly make no such promise here!" He spoke with inflexible firmness of purpose.

"Listen! Surely if you did love me, you could not be so cold. If you can say, 'Eleanour, I do not love you—I never loved you,' I will go—I will never see you again —I will die!"

Looking down upon the wild face raised to his—feeling the frenzied clasp of her slender hands—Wilfred's heart ached within him; he was dead to his own pain while

realizing hers—yet he was still stern as he said:—

"I am about to leave this house, Eleanour. I am going to your father. Will you accompany me?—or must he find you here?"

She released his hand and rose.

"Do what you will with me. I see you do not love me—no man could be so coldly cruel to a woman whom he loved!"

He picked up her cloak and wrapped it round her; as he did so she suddenly threw her arms round his neck, drew his head down towards her, and kissed him vehemently. Then she tied her own bonnet; he pulled her veil over her face—made her take his arm, and they passed noiselessly down the stairs and into the street.

After they left that room .neither of them spoke till they reached her father's door; then, when she joined her hands

over his arm with convulsive force, he said—

"I do not leave you yet."

It was very late—fortunately the servants had all gone to bed. Mr. Narpenth alone was up, sitting in his library: he believed Eleanour to be safe in her room—he had not seen her that evening; she had received his tidings with a calmness that had perplexed and frightened him; but of such a step as she had taken he had not thought her capable. Yet—as he heard Wilfred's soft knock and went to the door—a vague alarm, of which Eleanour was the object, possessed him. He changed colour when he saw who stood outside. Not losing his self-command, he made a sign of silence, closed the hall-door quietly, and led the way into his room: shut in there, he looked sternly at Eleanour and said—

"This means that——"

"I warned you, father—I have been to Wilfred. I never meant to come back; but he has brought me back."

Mr. Narpenth took his daughter's passive hand and led her from the room, saying—

"I was right it seems when I placed all my reliance on Wilfred's honour — none on my daughter's duty and obedience."

She turned at the door and answered,

"I am too old to be talked to of duty and obedience. Wilfred can throw me from him (and can kill me) by speaking five little words; none else can separate us—nothing but those words shall come between us."

A gesture of her father's obliged her to pass without further speech through the door which he held open for her.

Coming back to Wilfred, Mr. Narpenth said, in a heartbroken way—

"Marry her when you please! It is no use to strive against such a will!"

Wilfred, who had sunk into a chair immediately he entered the room, gazed vacantly at the speaker, not seeming to hear or to understand, but shaking as if in an ague-fit. Mr. Narpenth's anxiety took a new direction; it was evident that Wilfred was ill and could not be sent out doors again that night. The old man helped him to his own room, watched by him for the next few hours, and then, as soon as the servants were stirring, sent for a physician.

For many weeks Wilfred lay in the room to which he had been taken that night, and was as sedulously nursed and tended as if he had been Mr. Narpenth's

son—indeed, he became dearer to him than was that son.

When he was well enough to be moved, Wilfred was sent down to Thorndon, that change of air might complete his cure. Eleanour, whom mingled promises and threats had banished thence, then became his nurse.

How ill her lover had been, Eleanour did not know till the danger was past: had he died, she would never have forgiven her father for having kept her in this ignorance.

CHAPTER XII.

"Du liebst mich wohl, ich zweifle nicht daran,
Und lebte nicht, wenn mir ein Zweifel bliebe;
Doch liebst du mich, du lieber böser Mann,
Nicht so, wie ich dich liebe."

During his convalescence Eleanour felt that Wilfred was completely her own. Feeling this—believing in his love, and meeting with no opposition to her will—her exacting and unquiet spirit grew calm; her lover's influence was good, but her own love for him—which seemed to be wearing the selfishness out of her nature—was the refining influence which each day lent her manner

more and more of that meek and quiet grace which she knew that Wilfred regarded as the crown of true womanliness.

It was early summer, and very lovely weather; the short walks and longer drives, the loiterings in the garden, the rests upon a soft couch while Eleanour played or read to him—all these were pleasant; and, as long as physical feebleness kept his spirit languid, they sufficed to make Wilfred believe that he was happy.

Eleanour and Wilfred had no lovers' quarrels; the lover knew that his mistress had faults—for a lover he knew this clearly, and felt them keenly—but he believed her to be open as the day; he endured no torments upon the rack of jealousy; he did not even speculate whether so fierce a flame as Eleanour's love had shown itself to be could prove a constant flame; or whether any other before him had inspired her with a kindred

flame. Had he at this time used the right key, the inmost chamber of Eleanour's heart might have flown open for him: as it was, he did not know all its secrets.

The returning strength that woke discords in Wilfred's life, fortunately or unfortunately, brought a charm to silence them for a time. As things were, it seemed to him that it was incumbent on him to act in accordance with what he knew was Mr. Narpenth's urgent wish—to accept the offer which had been made him, and to try and fit himself for the post offered. It appeared to him that he had no choice but to do this.

If it was a sacrifice that he made, it was not made by halves; he plunged desperately into the mysteries of banking: it was this definite day's work—at once so absorbing and so mechanical—which acted as a powerful opiate upon such higher impulses and subtler consciousnesses as had begun to

stir uneasily within him. Still there were lulls and pauses in his busy life when the undercurrent of perplexed feeling would bubble to the surface; and as the novelty of his new life wore off this occurred oftener, saddening him more and more.

It was not pleasing to Miss Narpenth that her poet-lover should be engrossed by such vulgar cares as those which had occupied her father all his life-time.

"It is good of him to try it, to please papa," she said; "but he will soon tire of it and give it up, I hope: such slavery is not fit for him—after we are married, at all events, he shall give it up."

Wilfred had entered upon his new pursuits somewhat prematurely, and too energetically. He worked indefatigably through the trying heat of the summer months. When autumn came he was looking frail;

alike unfit for a life of close application, and unfit to bear the uncertainties of temperature of an English winter. In spite of Thorndon air and Eleanour's nursing his health had never been completely re-established since his illness: whether the heavy melancholy that preyed upon him from time to time were the cause or the effect of his physical state, it would have been hard to say.

One evening, in the Thorndon drawing-room at twilight, Eleanour—standing near the window, pretending to look out—studied her lover's fire-gazing face intently. Without—

> "The bitter east-wind was wildly straining
> The yellow trees in the autumn raining;"

within all was warmth, elegance, and luxury. Wilfred, sitting near the hearth, leaning his head on his hand, watched the flickering blaze with a face so coldly sad,

so palely weary, that Eleanour, as she looked at him, with difficulty suppressed a sob, half of pain, half of anger. Approaching him at last, she knelt on the hearth-rug before him, and took his hand in hers.

"You are looking so tragically serious, dearest," she said.

He smiled down on her; but the smile was not a bright one, and it died out quickly.

"What papa says about you is true."

He did not ask what that was; she continued:—

"Now look at this hand, Wilfred, as it lies in mine; is it fit to be a man's hand? Mine is not large or coarse, even for a woman; but see how thin and white yours is. There! when I hold it up before the fire it appears almost transparent, and the long fingers are so

very slight. It is a dear and beautiful hand—my poet's hand; but I wish—I wish it looked less frail."

She pressed the hand that she had been playing with to her lips.

"Do not fret or weary yourself about me, love," Wilfred answered quietly—in what she called his repressing manner.

"But I must—I will! You look ill and sad. You cannot say that you are well and strong—you cannot say that you are content and happy."

"Do not turn inquisitor, dear Eleanour—it is not safe. I have warned you many times to be less of an anatomist. Nothing earthly will bear to be looked at too curiously, or to be picked to pieces—earthly happiness certainly will not bear to be treated thus."

"But you know that you are not happy! That tiresome office work wears and worries you."

"Indeed no! Work is a blessing beyond all other blessings, almost, to one who has led such an idle life."

"But you cannot say that, in spite of this blessing, you are content and happy. Why are you not so?"

"Eleanour! Eleanour! are there no secret chambers in your heart into which you find it not well to look much? Do you wish to compel me to strict self-scrutiny? For my not being content—it is not in some natures to be content—perhaps it is not in mine. For my not being happy, I do not even believe in happiness. Do you not know enough of me to know that the burden of my half-knowledge must press upon me? Can I remember that I have a living father, of whose name, temptation, crime, and misery, I am ignorant; of whose present way of life I know nothing, but whom circumstances may at any

time throw into my path—can I remember this—and be happy and content?"

She pressed her cheek against his knee and sighed:—

"If only you loved me as I love you, all this would be nothing to you!"

"It would not be right that all this should be nothing to me. You must feel that it would not be right! And there is more, Eleanour, if you are intent upon my confession—a great remorse, which is as vague as it is great, preys on me. All my being seems in conflict. I have many consciences: one upholds what the other condemns—what is right, what wrong, I do not know. Then I am weighed upon by a sense of wasted power—by the possession of faculties that seem superfluous—at the same time that life, duty, love, all things seem too much for me—seem to overtask my feebleness. Once

you called me unmanly. I fear that I am unmanly, Eleanour—weak where I should be strong; and yet not altogether weak, as I feel sometimes, when I struggle mightily in great and awful darkness, and almost grasp the truth."

"I do not understand you," Eleanour said, shaking her head, while perplexity and pain clouded her handsome face. "You remind me, however, of something I read this morning, and marked to read to you."

She rose, took a book from the table, and then resumed her former place, reading by the light of the fire:—

"'Si vous êtes femme, si vous êtes sage, et si votre cœur, tout en prenant feu, se donne encore le temps de choisir, ecoutez un conseil; n'aimez ni un Voltaire, ni un Jean-Jacques, ni un Goethe, ni un Château-briand, si, par hazard, il vous arrive de

rencontrer de tels grands homme sur votre chemin.

"'Aimez, qui donc? Aimez qui bonnement et pleinement vous le rendra, aimez qui ait à vous offrir, tout un cœur, n'eût il aucun nom célèbre. Un Des Grieux honnête et une Manon sage, voilà l'idéal de ceux qui savent être heureux en silence, la gloire en tous dans le tête-à-tête ne fait que tout gâter.'"*

"If I did not believe better of you, I might think that you wished to mock me, Eleanour! What is this to us? I have no name, fame, or glory to offer you—it is not such things as these that threaten your happiness."

"You will win name, fame, and glory, Wilfred! But I will never be jealous of them—I will accept the love you have left for me, and be proud of the name that you will make *un nom célèbre.*"

* Sainte-Beuve.

"You are building up false hopes, which you will never see realized."

"You do not mean that you will never write again? You do not mean to let your imagination go to sleep?"

"If it will, it may!"

"Do you mean to settle down into nothing but a banker, then?"

"If I can, I will."

"You cannot, and you know you cannot—that is my consolation! You are trying to torment me."

"No, Eleanour; nor am I speaking otherwise than seriously. I shall endeavour to be true to the responsibilities your father has laid upon me—this is the very least I can do for him and for you. Eleanour, why would you love me so wilfully? Why would you not give me up? If you will have the truth, the humiliation of my present position seems sometimes more than I can bear!"

Eleanour rose and drew away from her incomprehensible lover. As she stood proudly erect in the bright firelight—which played upon the rich warm colour of her dress, and flashed upon her jewels—he watched her, with no feeling that they were akin, and no belief that one day this woman would be his wife.

"Sometime, Eleanour," he continued, "even you will despise me—sometime even you will feel that I should, at all costs of pain to both of us, have refused to let you link your life to mine, and have drifted on to meet my fate alone. If I go away for this winter, try your heart once more—try and teach it not to love me."

"If you go away!" Eleanour repeated. Startled love banished her haughty displeasure. "If you go away! What does that mean, Wilfred?"

"I have been wishing and dreading to tell you what it means. At your father's

desire, I went yesterday to consult a physician; I am to see him again in a few days. He told me that it would probably be advisable for me to spend next winter abroad. When I go again he will tell me something more definite."

Eleanour had glided behind Wilfred's chair: she twined her arms round his neck and rested her head against his.

"You shall not leave me! If you must go, we will go together; we will be married first, and I shall have the right to take care of you. I could not bear to be left behind—alone!" she whispered.

"For once you will find me firm as adamant, Eleanour! It shall not be as you say, love—if I am forced to go, I go alone. Your father expressly desires now that our marriage should not be hurried—a few months may put me in possession of——."

"I know, I know!" she shuddered

slightly, as she spoke. "You must not go, if I may not go too—it would be dreadful! I could not bear it!"

"Very well, Eleanour. You shall decide whether I go or stay. I do not suppose that one way or the other it will be quite a matter of life and death."

"Life and death!—how shockingly you talk. I feel that papa will make me send you. Oh! what a dreary, gloomy winter mine will be!"

"We must live through it, by looking forward to the spring."

"You say that easily."

"You think that I shall part from you without pain?"

"Oh no! not that—I could not bear to believe that!—but you talk so coldly—oh, so coldly! Dear Wilfred, if you could but know how often you make my heart ache and shiver! *Do* you love me?"

Once more she was on her knees before him, and her imploring eyes were full of tears. He drew her close and kissed her.

"Ask that question again, and I will doubt if *you* love *me!*" he said. "A woman loving perfectly could not doubt the truth and honour of the man she loved—and when you doubt my love, do you not doubt my truth and honour?"

The harshness of his words was softened by caresses—at that moment he did believe that he loved her.

Wilfred's second visit to the physician decided the question of his going abroad. A winter in a milder and more settled climate was not merely recommended, but pronounced to be absolutely necessary for the restoration of his health. Mr. Narpenth insisted that it should be tried, and by his generous insistance laid Wilfred under yet one more obligation. That Mr. Narpenth

had any interested motive for desiring Wilfred's absence, not even his stipulation that the engagement should continue to be kept secret caused Wilfred to suspect.

Eleanour shrank from the contemplation of his long absence with an intense pain which was sharpened by jealous fear. During the weeks that intervened between the physician's verdict and Wilfred's departure he had much to endure from Eleanour—many harassing and passionate scenes to go through. He had looked forward to the actual parting with such dread and distress on Eleanour's account, that when it was over, when he had fairly started on his route, he experienced a sense of relief which overpowered his own pain at the prospect of so long a separation, and made him sink back in the railway-carriage with the thought—

"At last I can have rest! I am my own

again, for a time at least: I can live my own life, and I can have rest!"

Some of his late interviews with Eleanour had exhausted him dangerously—exhausted his patience and his strength, and left him feeling shattered and irritated; when he now said:—

"I can at last have rest!" a delicious sensation of release, of languor, and of repose stole over him.

CHAPTER XIII.

"Du bist wie einer Blume,
So hold und schön and rein,
Ich schau dich an und Wehmuth
Schleicht mir ins Herz hinein."

FALLING again into a vagabond way of life, Wilfred was inclined to fall again into the former thought-vagabondism; but he strove against this inclination. He felt old now; and when he looked back upon his past, he smiled half-sadly, half-mockingly — regarding all the aspirations of that past which were impossible of realization in his present position, and out of harmony with it, as the follies and enthu-

siasms of youth. He did not believe himself, with his assured prospects, to be any nearer that which had been the goal of his desires—happiness—than he had been when all before him looked darkly vague and threatening; but by ceasing to strive and strain towards that goal, did he not show that he had gained in wisdom; and did he not win a good thing—rest?

Rest! Was the mood that had been on him so long one of rest? Was it not rather one of sloth and indifference, in which the waters of his soul grew stagnant? As to being wiser than of old, was he not merely feebler, more a creature of instinct, less a reasoning and willing man? Had he not allowed himself to be the plaything of impulse and of circumstances, till he was now their bounden slave? Was not his present peace one of heathenish indifference, rather than of Christian faith? He

tried to stop this self-questioning. He reminded himself that he had always imagined the acme of human happiness to consist in loving and in being loved. If he were not happy now, surely this was proof sufficient that he had expected a happiness, either of degree or of kind, such as never fell to the lot of a mortal. He could not doubt that Eleanour loved him. He did not notice how much, in all his thoughts of her, he dwelt on her love for him, how little on his love for her: he thought of her very tenderly now that they were so far apart, and he missed her in a thousand ways—they had lived so much together, that he must have missed her from mere force of habit, had there been no tie between them. Neither did he notice how, in all his vague musings about abstract womanhood, not such a woman as Eleanour presented herself to

his fancy as its ideal type; but a woman's face, paler, meeker, more purely-spiritual, would shine upon him mildly, with the soft radiance of dove-like eyes.

In one of the galleries he most frequented hung a Madonna before which he paused day after day, gazing upon it till he felt as if his soul were being drawn through his eyes; and, as he gazed, longing to kneel before it and gaze on for ever. Might he sit at the feet of such a being—of a woman whose utter humility should inspire him with utter veneration—he believed that his nature would be exalted, his spirit enlightened, and his soul drawn ever nearer to God, inevitably and unconsciously. The feeling he could entertain for such a woman would, however, be—so he told himself—not love, but religion—and mortals, he supposed, needed to be loved by a woman, not to spend

life in the worship of a saint; that a true man's true love for a true woman will be a complex feeling of protecting tenderness for a weaker and inferior creature, and of reverent worship for a purer and clearer spirit, he had not learnt as yet.

For Wilfred the winter months glided by like a dream in which the past and present intermix confusedly. It startled him to hear from Eleanour that some mild, spring-like days had already been enjoyed at Thorndon, and that she began to look upon the time of his return as near. He felt surprised that this winter was passing away uneventfully: the possibility that Mr. Ireton's death might at any time bring some great change in his fate, was a thought that dwelt with him constantly, almost without his consciousness of its presence.

Early in the spring Wilfred travelled to Heidelberg.

"Do not wander again," Eleanour said, in the first letter she wrote to him after his arrival there. "I like to think of you in one place; perhaps even in a month or two I may persuade papa, who will not hear of your returning yet, to take me to join you at Heidelberg. Sometimes I think it might be pleasant to be married abroad, and escape the fuss and worry of an English wedding. If we did this, I should take all my friends by surprise—for, according to papa's wish, my engagement has not been mentioned to anyone. At all events, promise me not to leave Heidelberg till you start for home, or till I have joined you there."

Wilfred willingly gave the promise Eleanour required—the air of Heidelberg suited him; the weather since he arrived there had been lovely. He wandered along the winding valley of the Neckar

—paced the hill-terraces, watching the swelling buds of the chestnuts, showing fuller each day against the bright, breezy, blue sky—haunted the castle to gaze upon the glory of the hills and valley at sunset—or climbed to the doubtful region of the Königstuhl, to be driven back by mists which he was forbidden to face, and was well content to remain at beautiful Heidelberg.

There were many English in the town, but Wilfred made no acquaintance. He listened in amused silence to the high-flown praises lavished by the German students on this and that English girl; and from the manner of these praises he formed his own idea of the character of the beauty in question. "Engelschön," "hold," "ruhig," "Engel-mild," were epithets which impressed him pleasantly. He noted that when these were used there was no

slightest touch of irreverence or familiarity in the manner of the speakers.

One evening Wilfred lingered later than usual on the hill. All was breathlessly quiet, balmily calm there, and he watched the wreathing white mists stealing up from the river till the deepening twilight rendered everything indistinct, save the lights kindling one by one in the town below. Rousing himself at last from his pleasant trance, to feel that it was late and growing cold, he rushed down the narrow winding wood-paths impetuously; at a sudden turn he almost ran over two women who pursued the same path more leisurely. His sudden descent had startled them. Just as he was about to pass with a brief apology, one of them, catching her foot in the root of a tree stretching across the way, would have fallen but for his timely aid. She uttered

a slight cry of pain, and leant heavily on his arm and on her companion's shoulder.

Wilfred began to express his concern in German; but, catching a few words of English exchanged between the ladies, he said:—

"I am afraid you have hurt your foot, and that through my fault—I startled you by my hasty descent. Pray let me do anything that may be in my power to remedy the mischief I have caused."

"The pain will soon pass, I daresay; but I must beg your assistance home—this child is hardly strong enough to help me; I am lamed for the time. Fortunately we have not far to go."

It was so dark in the wood now that Wilfred could not see the faces of either of the ladies. Slow as was their progress, it was not long before they reached the gate of a terraced garden belonging to a

small house — standing beneath the castle and above the road—which Wilfred had often noticed and admired. The lady who had before spoken informed him that this was their destination. At the gate an English servant, who had evidently been on the watch, met them. A few words explained what had happened. With many expressions of concern, she led the way into a room from the white curtained window of which light streamed out upon a tiny lawn.

"Why! it is Wilfred Mason!" Mrs. Southern exclaimed, just as Wilfred had recognized his companions.

Sinking on the sofa, she stretched both hands out to him. When his hands were again released he turned from the mother's agitated face to that of the daughter; he saw that she was altered. Hers was no child's face now: the lovely eyes were

still serene, and about the mouth dwelt the expression of repose he so well remembered; but the serenity of the eyes was dashed and deepened by sadness, and the repose of the mouth had something in it of patience and resignation. Both Felicia and her mother still wore the black they had put on in mourning for Herbert.

"And we did not know each other!" Wilfred said, as Felicia's little hand entered his.

"Yes—I knew you on the hill directly you spoke," she said simply.

"Why did you not tell me, child, instead of letting me puzzle myself so—trying to fix the voice that seemed so familiar on somebody or other? Why did you not tell me it was Wilfred?"

"I do not know, mamma. I was sure you would soon find it out."

"And I did not instinctively recognize

the presence of my Schutzengel!" said Wilfred.

The lightness of his tone was assumed. A subtle sense of something higher than pleasure stole through him as he held the girl's hand in his. She turned a little from him to hide her tearful eyes; in her joy at meeting Wilfred, Herbert's friend, her faithful heart mourned afresh for Herbert. Wilfred forgot to drop the hand he had taken, while, gazing at the slight figure and averted head, he strove to discover in what the woman differed from the child. The heavy curls had disappeared from Felicia's shoulders; but to-night when she hastily removed her bonnet the braids of her brown hair had slipped from round her head, and had been pushed back from the small white ears and slender throat, as those curls had so often been. It was not till she

turned her eyes upon him again that Wilfred understood the nature of the chief change—the eyes, with dove-hued shades beneath them, for all their serenity no longer looked like eyes that never wept; the cheeks, so colourless except when some emotion tinged them for a moment, were not unused to a baptism of tears; and something in the curve of the sweet lips betrayed that they oftener smiled in patience than in mirth. It was sorrow that had made a woman of the child.

Gently drawing her hand from Wilfred's—he seemed to have forgotton that he still held it—Felicia turned towards her mother, who had leant back, looking faint and pale.

"Mother, dear, your foot hurts you," she said.

"I think a doctor had better examine your mother's foot," Wilfred remarked, rousing himself from a saddening train of

thought. "Have you consulted any one here? Do you know anyone you would like me to send?"

Having received instructions from Felicia as to whom he should ask to call, and having ascertained that he could be of no further use that night, Wilfred took his leave, saying that he should venture to call early next day to enquire for Mrs. Southern.

When Wilfred woke next morning, he was perplexed to understand the elasticity of his own mood as he swung open his casement and looked out towards the hill. A warm rain had fallen in the night, the sun shone softly now; even from that distance he fancied he could see a change in the woods—fancied that they were thickened by buds more nearly ready to burst. No wonder that on such a morning a new sense of pleasure in the renewing of all things—in the renewing of old friend-

ship among other things—should fill him with a prescience of joy to come.

He left his quarters early, and naturally proceeded straightway to the little house in the terraced garden. In all respects this little house seemed like an English home; the English servant, whom he remembered to have seen at Beech Holmes, admitted him to the room in which he had been the night before; an English breakfast stood ready on the table, and a small fire blazed cheerfully in an open grate. The projecting casement window—framed without by greening creepers, and within by the shining leaves of a delicate kind of ivy—commanded an extensive view down the lovely valley of the Neckar; in this window Wilfred stood till the sound of an opening door made him look round, and then hasten across the room to give his arm

to Mrs. Southern, who entered, leaning on Felicia's shoulder. The doctor had pronounced the hurt to her foot to be a very trifling matter, which a few days' rest would set all right; and Felicia had not been able to persuade her to keep her bed.

"You must breakfast with us, even if you have already breakfasted," Mrs. Southern said; "but pray don't imagine that we are often so late—I was a little tired this morning."

Wilfred was glad to remain. When seated at the table, he found he had so placed himself that Felicia's fair head and clear profile seemed to be framed by the young green ivy leaves. The pure morning light poured upon this pretty and pleasant picture, and his eyes continually returned to the quiet contemplation of it.

As of old, Felicia talked very little

and her mother a good deal. Mrs. Southern's manner was subdued; but through all the dimming of sorrow the bright and energetic spirit still flashed. For an hour or two after breakfast was ended Wilfred sat by her couch, while Felicia flitted noiselessly in and out, and to and fro, diligent in household duty, yet full of quiet and repose. Mrs. Southern spoke to Wilfred of the past—of her son's life, and of his death—of his goodness—of the greatness of her loss; she wept a little, but dried her eyes and brightened her face to a smile when Felicia came in. When alone with Wilfred, she said:—

"I dare not indulge in this way often"—alluding to her tears—"Felicia devotes her whole life to me. The only return I can make her is to keep a cheerful face. Thank God! I can generally

keep a cheerful heart, too. It is only now and then—when the memory of what he was—the sense of what I lost in him—comes over me afresh, and for the time is stronger than my faith—that I give way. As for that quiet child of mine, no one can tell the depth of feeling and of suffering which she hides under her sweet serenity."

"And so you are abroad on account of your health," Mrs. Southern said, as Felicia re-entered, carrying some books in her hand. Her household work was done now, and she sat down to the little table in the window. "You look much more robust than you used to look," Mrs. Southern added; "I hope you have been leading a more regular life, not ruining your health by overwork and careless living."

"I must tell you all about myself, my

position, and my prospects some other day," Wilfred answered.

As he spoke, he felt that it would not be pleasant to him to give a *full* account of himself. He recalled Mr. Narpenth's wish, that his daughter's engagement should not at present be made known, without dissatisfaction. Always somewhat morbidly sensitive, he felt that he lay open to the suspicion of having sold himself and his literary ambition for ease and wealth: that he should clear himself from any such imputation, by explaining the peculiarity of the position in which Eleanour's conduct had placed him, was of course impossible.

He now rose to take his leave; as he did so, Mrs. Southern glanced towards her daughter.

"Is it lesson-day again, Felicia?" she asked.

Felicia's "yes, mamma," was followed by a heavy sigh.

"Poor child! Wilfred, can you recommend a German master for Felicia? I want her to acquire a thorough knowledge of the language; and, though she does not often dislike people, she dislikes her present teacher so excessively, that the lessons are quite an infliction."

"I am afraid all my pleasure in German will be spoilt; and I know I should love it, if it were not for Dr. Schneider," Felicia said, rather plaintively.

"Schneider! he is not a fit man—a fussy pedant, a regular grammar and dictionary man, and not in any way a gentleman. Miss Southern ought not to take another lesson of such a fellow; I can understand how utterly repugnant to her his presence must be."

"He makes me feel wicked. I am glad you justify my dislike a little; but I should not wish to hurt his feelings, though I

do dislike him so much. I can quite well endure a few more lessons, if I may look forward to having a pleasanter teacher afterwards."

"Can you recommend anyone?" Mrs. Southern asked again.

"I can make inquiries; at this moment I do not remember anyone whom I should like to recommend. What progress have you made, Miss Southern? Can you read with tolerable ease?"

"I am sure she will not feel at ease with you, Wilfred, if you call her 'Miss Southern!'"

"It does not seem natural," Felicia said.

"And it does not seem natural to me, to see my little friend grown into a woman. I was going to say that, if Mrs. Southern thinks it would be any advantage to you to read German with me for an hour or two every morning, I am com-

pletely idle, and quite at your service."

"I should think it would be a great advantage to Felicia: I know you were even formerly a good German scholar."

"Well, then I may consider that my services are accepted."

He looked for Felicia's answer.

"You are very kind. I am afraid you will find me rather stupid; you must not spend much time upon me," she said—and her sweet face showed the pleasure she felt.

"Before Wilfred goes, Felicia, take him into the garden, and show him the view from the upper terrace: a little air will do you good, child—prepare you to endure your smoky master. You have brought me no violets this morning."

"I will get my hat, mamma."

The hat was not put on, however—as Felicia led the way into the garden she carried it in her hand; then, while she

sought for violets in shelter of the hedge, Wilfred held it for her. The air was so soft, and the sunshine so mild, that she did not need it even while they paced up and down that highest terrace together; talking of nothing particular—of the beauty of the landscape, the loveliness of the weather—and feeling all beauty and loveliness more near and more dear than was even their wont.

By-and-by a long silence fell. As they turned at the end of the terrace, Felicia looked straight up into Wilfred's face, and said, while her fingers played with her mother's violets—not tearing them to pieces, but touching them softly and caressingly:—

"I have had something against you in my heart, and it has pained me to have it there."

Seeing that she trembled, and that her eyes filled with tears, Wilfred—with a manner of protection and of reassuring tender-

ness—took her hand and drew it through his arm, saying:—

"It pains me to hear that I have given you pain."

Felicia withdrew her hand gently, as she asked:—

"Why did you never write to my dear brother? Was it not unkind? Did it not seem as if you had forgotten him? He so longed to see you or to hear of you. He spoke of you just before he died. I think he loved you more than you deserved from him. Why did you leave his letters unanswered?"

"Indeed, he did love me more than I deserved!" Wilfred said, warmly. Then he spoke of sickness, disappointment, misery, of homeless wanderings; accusing, while he excused himself. He spoke pathetically, and at some length: the girl's hand voluntarily stole within his arm; and presently

—for she had listened with bowed head, and he had not been able to read her face—he was startled to hear a low sob break from her.

"Felicia!"

Overmastered by emotions long studiously repressed, she leant her brow against his arm and wept—but not violently or long.

"Do not tell mamma!" were her first words when she could speak; "she thinks I never cry now—I do not often; but—there is so much sorrow in the world, and I used to think it was such a happy world."

A little spring ran from the hill-side into a small stone-basin in the garden. Felicia paused by it and, kneeling down, bathed her eyes with her handkerchief.

Wilfred stood by watching her: his heart was full of contending feelings—for him Felicia was all the child again; and yet—Turning up her pale, faintly-smiling face to the sunshine presently, she asked:—

"Do my eyes show that I have been crying now?"

Shading his own eyes with his hand he looked into hers: they were dimmed, but peaceful. He answered softly:—

"No, my child."

"Miss Felicia, your German master is come," the servant announced.

Wilfred took his leave of Felicia at the house-door with the words:—

"To-morrow I am to be your master. Good-bye, dear little pupil."

She smiled brightly and went in.

"All the child still," he murmured. "Purely child-hearted, without a touch of unchildlike self-consciousness. God keep her as she is!"

He wandered along the valley; not thinking, not heeding, where he wandered. An exquisite melancholy, a dim sense of sorrow, a religious feeling of the fresh beauty of

all things, was over him. He did not return to his inn till evening. The lamp burnt in the parlour of the small house in the garden as he passed by it: he longed to enter there as to a home of rest. He was footsore and weary; but he did not enter—he passed on.

CHAPTER XIV.

"Mächtig seyd ihr, ihr seyd's durch der Gegenwart ruhigen Zauber,
Was die Stille nicht wirkt, wirkt die rauschender nie."

Too late for the table-d'hôte, Wilfred dined in his room. As he sipped his coffee he began to look over his whole library of German authors; hunting out and marking poems and fragments of plays which were beautiful enough, and pure enough, to be read with Felicia.

Goethe, Schiller, Uhland, Bürger, Chamisso Heine, Körner, Geibel, Freiligrath, Lenau, and Rückert soon encumbered his table.

Yet from none of these did he select much: many things which he would have read and discussed with Eleanour were rejected for Felicia. He noticed this presently, as he passed over a scene that he had actually read with Eleanour; and he paused to try and account to himself for the fact.

"Felicia is but a child," he said, "and Eleanour—why, Eleanour is, let me see, she is ten or twelve years older than Felicia—she is almost my own age, she tells me, and she has had much experience of life, too."

Even as he thought of Eleanour, a letter from her was brought to him. A longer interval than usual had elapsed since he last heard, and he opened her letter with the impatience of curiosity or of love. In it there was this passage:—"Papa is often very gloomy and depressed; I think he misses you more than

I do. I do not miss you as I expected to do, and this must be because I seem to live in you. Do you ever feel that your soul is absent from you—present with me? You ought to feel so; for my soul is often with you. My life is often quite mechanical—I do things as if in a dream, and I think of nothing but you. You do not half guess how I love you! You cannot guess, for you are too cold ever to love as I do! Beware of trying me too long, Wilfred. Come home soon. Sometimes I feel as if my trance-life could not last much longer; and it will not be safe to wake from it till you are home. Of course you do not understand me—for I do not understand myself. The truth is, Wilfred—I know you will be angry, but I will speak—the truth is that I am jealous. Your letters do not content me—they are so brief, and as cold as they are beautiful.

I want your looks to contradict your words, or I shall begin to doubt if you love me. I have written it now, and the words frighten me. Oh, write soon, dearest Wilfred, and say that you do love your devoted Eleanour. I have not dared to write half I think. I shall be miserable till you send me an assurance of your love. Sometimes it seems to me as if, loving you, I doomed my heart to beat itself out against a rock; as if I should wreck all my life upon yours, and never win your love—not such love as will satisfy me."

Other parts of the letter were in a yet more passionate strain. Wilfred read with a contracted brow and a compressed mouth; then he laid the letter down, not to write immediately a re-assuring answer, but to think.

"Why does she love me?" he asked. "In intellect she is not my inferior—in

knowledge and in worldly experience she is in advance of me; of the little that is good and high-toned in my moral nature she is ignorant, for in her presence nothing calls it forth. What is it in me that causes her to love me with this blind, persistent, and generous passion? Will this love last, when daily companionship has opened her eyes to what I really am? When uncongenial employment and the deadening influence of monotonous prosperity have killed that power in me upon which, exaggerating its nature and degree, she builds ambitious hopes, will she then love me? When this power is gone, and the glamour it spread round is dissipated, will she not find that her hero is less than a true man? Will she not then hate and despise me with the same passionate force with which she now loves me?"

Wilfred's thoughts next took the direc-

tion of moralizing upon the nature of the relation which should subsist between a true man and true woman, who, as life-long companions, are through life to grow more and more into each other and unto God.

The woman, Wilfred thought, should at the outset be beyond all question the man's intellectual inferior; yet should she have intelligence enough to apprehend that greatness of masculine intellect with which she becomes identified — so that the consciousness of inferiority should never be felt to be a humiliating consciousness.

More ignorant of the world, and less practised in all knowledge than the man, a true woman should yet commend herself to a man's reverence—by a certain meek and unconscious wisdom—by an untroubled clearness of moral instinct — by keeping about her an atmosphere of spirituality, of holy calm, which shall enable the man

to *rest* securely in her from the storm and trouble of life; to regard her as his guiding-star in times of moral darkness, and as his guardian angel in times of temptation.

At peculiar crises the man should be able to feel content to take the woman's hand and let her lead him, as the veriest child may lead the blind; while, at other times, in all the ordinary affairs of life, she, like a child, should cling to him—with unreasoning trust in his larger knowledge, his stronger reason, and his keener sight.

Such was Wilfred's fancy of the relation that should subsist between husband and wife: surely a beautiful fancy, and one not impossible of realization. And this, or something like this, will continue to be the poet's ideal view: he will love to call his wife "child," to think of her as of a child—true, pure, loving, and trusting as

untried and undefiled childhood; and while he can thus think of her, she will be to him as one of those "little ones," to sin against whom is to sin more directly against their Maker—to sin against whom is next to impossible to a truly manly nature. For her he will keep himself pure; and so will she prove for him both sword and buckler—shielding him from attacks from without, repelling those from within.

Surely those women who clamour for other rights; for place, position, influence, part in the world's work and recognition of intellectual equality—surely such women feel that they fall far short of this ideal standard; feel that they are neither child-like true nor child-like pure; feel that they have nothing of heaven lingering about them, and that their kingdom, if kingdom they have, must, therefore, be of this world.

One might almost fear—seeing how the

women of to-day are lightly stirred up to run after some new fashion of faith or of works—that heaven is not so near to them as it was to their mothers and their grandmothers—that religion is a feebler power with them—that their hearts are empty of all secure trust and high faith in the beneficence of God's ordinations.

Surely no reviler and libeller of the sex ever put upon women so profound and so bitter a reproach as they put upon themselves when their lives become nothing but a passionate protest against their womanhood, and a wild straining to throw off, as far as may be, its distinguishing characteristics—to be no longer distinctively recognized as women, but to assimilate themselves to men by employment, manners, speech, and even dress.

The train of thought into which Wilfred had fallen held him a long time: half

roused out of it, instead of answering Eleanour's letter, he scribbled some verses on a blank sheet of paper near him. Ashamed of them when they were written, he would have tossed them into the fire had one burnt in his room; as it was, he hastily folded up the paper and shut it into his note-book, to be burnt some other time. It did not meet his eyes again, and he forgot its existence till long afterwards.

In writing these verses, Wilfred pictured himself as married to Eleanour—as having been her husband long enough to feel that the dainty and delicate fingers of his beautiful wife were gradually rubbing the bloom from love, life, all things; playing upon his heart-strings, and turning all life's music into discord; digging deep into his soul, and dragging its most secretly holy things out into the garish light of day, in order

that the world might admire, and might justify her choice by its admiration.

He pictured himself as becoming utterly heart-sick—sick of his wife's beauty, wisdom, accomplishments—most of all sick of those fine feelings which she allowed the slightest breeze to unfurl and flutter in the faces of all beholders. He pictured himself as conscious that her nature scorched and shrivelled up the finer attributes of his own, as a fierce sun must scorch up seed sown in stony and exposed places; and, at the same time, fully conscious that, after her nature, she loved him well, and that the bond between them was a life-long one. He thought of himself as despairing of escape from her presence; as half maddened by desperate longing to be able to throw a veil over her—body and soul—to be able to keep her imprisoned in its folds, that she might cease to blast

him by her over-bright beauty, and her utter want of reticence.

Finally, he described himself as—driven to extremities by the ghoul-like nature of his dainty, delicate-fingered, beautiful, and gifted wife—seeking darkness, quiet, and rest in a grave, and even there not finding them: as haunted, even there, by a consciousness that his widow's flag of feeling was waving above him; that the world was called upon to admire her grief, her constancy, and the marble "hope, pointing to heaven," which she had placed over him.

Such was the purport of the verses which one day fell into Eleanour's hands.

The next morning was the first of many similarly spent. Wilfred went early to the little house in the garden and read German with Felicia for two hours; he varied these readings with such subtle care and

skill, that Felicia never wearied of them: after the reading was over Wilfred and Felicia, and, when she had quite recovered from her accident, Mrs. Southern, walked out together. Lovely Heidelberg looked lovelier each day, and the rambles grew longer and longer.

Felicia's progress in German was rapid. She was not quick of intellect, but when her heart was interested that quickened her whole nature, and her appreciation of truth and beauty was deep and clear. Her face was an interesting study; Wilfred found that if in their readings they came upon a page of misty philosophy, or upon a poem that was only learned, intricate or ingenious, this tell-tale face grew dull and its eyes dim.

"Let us pass on to something else; this does not interest you," Wilfred always said when he saw this.

He was sure to be rewarded by a bright

and grateful smile, and by the most earnest attention to what he next selected.

Wilfred only slightly mentioned "the Southerns" in his letters to Eleanour, and did not mention his newly-found occupation and interest.

"Eleanour is naturally of a jealous disposition; she would torment herself with groundless fears and suspicions, and she would not in the least understand the sort of feeling I have for the dear child," he said to himself, in self-justification.

Did he himself the least understand the sort of feeling that was growing and strengthening in his heart for "the dear child?" Did he apprehend no danger for himself, or for the child, from this intimate intercourse, which must at no distant time be completely and for ever broken off? "Completely, at no distant time, and for ever

broken off"—he thought that his safety was contained within his certain knowledge that this must be so—that hers consisted in her perfect simplicity and innocency of heart.

CHAPTER XV.

"Mir ist als ob ich die Hände
Auf's Haupt dir liegen sollt,
Betend dass Gott dich erhälte,
So rein, und schön, und hold."

"To doubt her fairness were to want an eye;
To doubt her pureness were to want a heart."

"I WAS just going to put my books away—I thought you were not coming this morning."

Felicia rose from the table in the ivy-framed window as she spoke, and gave her hand to Wilfred with a bright smile. He was an hour later than usual, and she had given him up.

"I have been writing letters."

The occupation had reminded Wilfred of the rapid flight of time—of the near necessity for fixing a day for his departure. He spoke gravely.

"You have had no bad news?" Mrs. Southern asked.

"Oh no! Am I gloomy as well as unpunctual? Do not put away your books, Felicia—I hope you do not mean to punish me by not reading to-day. I have a long list of favourites for this morning: we may not have many more mornings—I must soon think of returning home."

Felicia's eyes drooped, but she said nothing. Without further preface, Wilfred opened a volume of Schiller's short poems, and pointed to the ballad of Ritter Toggenburg. Felicia began reading; but her master's attention wandered—he omitted to correct her. "Die Schöne engél-mild," he

kept repeating to himself, and his eyes rested upon the face of the reader—so dangerously near his own—instead of upon the book. His thoughts wandered wildly this morning; for he presently found himself speculating as to whether, had he been free to woo, he, like Ritter Toggenburg, could have won nothing but "treuer Schwester-liebe" from "die Schöne engel-mild" beside him.

"You have hardly corrected me at all," Felicia said, looking up into his face as she finished, with one of her direct and earnest looks.

"Do you like the ballad?" he asked.

His eyes fell before her clear glance, and his colour rose slightly.

"Yes, only I could not help thinking that, instead of passing his life in watching for his lady's face at the convent-

window, the knight might have found some good work to do for her sake."

"You unromantic practical child!" Mrs. Southern exclaimed.

Afraid that she had said what was foolish, Felicia's eyes questioned Wilfred somewhat timidly. He smiled, but the smile was not in the least scornful, and she was content.

"Das Mädchen aus der Fremde," "Die Theilung der Erde," "Würde der Frauen," and "Macht des Weibes," were next read; then "Der Handschuh:" this last ballad was spoilt by one line, Felicia thought—so she said, when Wilfred pressed for her opinion of it.

"Und er wirft ihr den Handschuh in's Gesicht."

"A knight who could throw her glove into a lady's face, on any provocation,

was not worthy of a more gentle-hearted lady—was he?"

"Your criticism is just—the poet's first thought was the best. See! this different line stands at the bottom of the page—'Und der Ritter sich tief verbeugend spricht;' that is certainly more knightly conduct. Now let us have something from Uhland—I want you to read the ballad 'Vom treuen Walther.'"*

*The following is a rough translation of this beautiful and pathetic ballad:—

THE BALLAD OF TRUE WALTER.

The true Walter was riding by
The chapel of Our Lady:
There knelt, in deepest penitence,
A maiden on the threshold.
"O stay, O stay, my Walter dear!
Know you no more the voice's sound
That once you heard so gladly?"

"Whom see I here?—the faithless maid,
Who once, alas once, was mine!
Where have you left your silken gown,
Where left your gold and jewels?"
"O that I ever left my truth!
Lost, ah lost, is my Paradise,
With thee I could retrieve it."

While Felicia read, Wilfred watched her covertly. As she came to the last verse, her cheek paled and her eyes widened

To horse he raised the lovely maid,
He felt a soft compassion;
And she clung fast around his waist
With arms so white and tender.
"Ah, Walter dear! my loving heart,
It beats on cold and lifeless bronze;
It beats not on your own heart."

On they rode to Walter's castle;
The place was empty and still,
She loosed the helmet of the knight—
Gone was his bloom of beauty.
"These pallid cheeks, these mournful eyes,
These are thy crown, thou faithful love?
To me wer't ne'er so lovely."

His armour loosed the gentle maid
From him whom she had wounded.
"What see I? ah! a sable garb,
Who died, by thee belovéd?"
"My dearest, whom I mourn for sore,
Whom I, on earth, find never more,
Nor shall find beyond the grave."

She sank down lowly at his feet,
Wide arms out-stretching wildly:
"Here lie I, a poor penitent,
Thee pray I for compassion.
O raise me up to new, fresh joy!
Let me upon thy faithful breast
Be healed of all my sorrow!"

and filled with tears. She read badly, for her voice almost failed her. Wilfred repeated after her:—

"Steh auf, steh auf, du armes Kind,
Ich kann dich nicht erheben;
Die Arme mir verschlossen sind,
Die Brust ist ohne Leben.
Sey traurig stets, wie ich es bin!
Die Lieb' ist hin! die Lieb' ist hin!
Und kehret niemals wieder." *

Wilfred read the verse with pathos. He was content that Felicia should be silent—not even raising her lids—when he had finished.

"I am sure you like that ballad," he said; "I think there is something inexpressibly sad and noble about it: the last verse breathes such holy constancy of en-

* "Arise! arise! oh thou poor child,
For I may not raise thee up;
These arms of mine are firmly closed,
Lifeless is this my bosom.
Be mournful ever, as am I,
For love is flown, for love is flown—
And it never comes again."

during sorrow, together with such tender forgiveness and compassion. One can fancy that the maiden died at his feet, broken-hearted, as his simply severe words awoke in her a full consciousness of her crime of faithlessness to one so faithful. I think you are tired. I will read to you now, 'Der König auf dem Thurme.'"

He read, but Felicia did not immediately grow calm and quiet again—the last lines—uttered with repressed passion, by the voice which she thought beautiful above all other voices—made her heart vibrate with emotions of sadness and longing which she did not understand:—

"'O selige Rast, wie verlang' ich dein!
O herrliche Nacht, wie säumst du so lang,
Da ich schaue der Sterne lichteren Schein
Und höre volleren Klang!"

So read Wilfred, and Felicia believed that it was his own sadness breathing through

these words which echoed so painfully in her heart.

"How full of 'Wehmuth' and 'Sehnsucht' those lines are, and what untranslatable words are those two! They mean something far deeper and more subtle than is expressed by such English words as 'melancholy' and 'desire,' do they not? Now we will have something more cheerful, for I do not know why I should strive to sadden you."

After "Des Goldschmied's Töchterlein," and "Jungfrau Sieglinde" had been gone through, Mrs. Southern interposed:—

"I do not know how long you two would go on if I did not stop you," she said; "I cannot stay in-doors any longer this lovely day, however, and I think it quite time you shut up your books."

They looked down the valley—which seemed filled full with sunshine, from the level

of the golden flashing water to the overarching blue of the sky—and obeyed Mrs. Southern's behest, without much reluctance.

"You have dutifully read all your master has required of you—now, have you any commands to lay on him?" Wilfred asked, a few mornings later.

Felicia's dainty Gesangbuch lay on the table: she took it in her hand; but her soft eyes were shy and anxious as she said:—

"Some of these hymns seem to me very beautiful; will you read a few of my favourites, and see if you like them?"

There was a slightly disdainful curve on Wilfred's lip as he answered:—

"I am at your service—pleased to please you, my child."

He let her hold the book, and he read what she pointed out—Luther's "Ein fester

Burg," and "Aus tiefer Noth;" Paul Gerhardt's "Nun ruhen alle Wälder;" Christian Gellert's "Herr, stärke mich," and then "Gelobt sey, der den Frühling schafft."

"I am afraid you do not care for them," she said; "perhaps they are not good poetry — perhaps I am not familiar enough with German to see their defects —still, I do think that if I were a German girl I should be very fond of my Gesangbuch, and very proud of it!"

She raised her eyes to his as she spoke, with a certain air of meek assurance, and of soft audacity. He took more than a fleeting glance into their clear depths as he answered:—

"I should like you to teach me to love what you love. Read to me now, if you are not tired, some more of those hymns which you like the best."

She complied, chose—

"Wohl dem, der sich auf seinen Gott,
Recht kindlich kann verlassen,"*

and

"Gieb dich zufrieden und seh stille."†

"There is a charm about them, certainly!" Wilfred said, breaking a grave silence. "An unmystical mysticism—a spiritual materialism. There is something soothing in the reverent familiarity with which they treat of the highest spiritual truths; they seem to express the simple faith of children—children of light."

Gazing at Felicia, still bending lovingly over her book, he thought—

* "'Tis well with him who on his God
Right childlikely relieth."

† The first verse of which is thus translated by Miss Winkworth, in the "Lyra Germanica:—"

"Be thou content; be still before
His face, at whose right hand doth reign
Fullness of joy for evermore;
Without whom all thy toil is vain.
He is thy living spring, thy sun, whose rays
Make glad with life and light thy dreary days—
Be thou content."

"And you are a child of light!—how far above me you stand! Expressions of utter faith and of absolute resignation have nothing unnatural in them when they fall from your lips. For the future there will be a Saint Felicia in my calendar."

"May I borrow your book, Felicia? I feel that one must know these intimately before one loves them well," he said aloud.

She lifted up a pleased face.

"Will you have it to keep? I should so much like to give you something," she said simply. "Not in return for your kindness, but to thank you for it."

"I will have it to keep then. I shall like to possess something that has been yours—and this book will be a fitting memento of you. Will you write my name in it?"

He put a pen into her hand. She took

it, looked at the blank page, and then at Wilfred, and asked:—

"What shall I write?"

The look and the question suggested a whole train of gloomy thoughts.

"Write nothing but 'Wilfred, from Felicia,'" he said.

He held the book open in his hand, gazing at the writing, and fell into a reverie. Mrs. Southern, who was gardening outside, startled him from his musings by looking in at the window, to summon him and Felicia into the garden to her assistance.

Wilfred put the little book into its case, and thrust it into his breast-pocket.

When they appeared in the sunny garden together, Mrs. Southern gave them one of her quick, careful glances.

"You both seemed very grave when I peeped in on you," she said.

"Mamma, you know I wanted to give Wilfred something," Felicia answered; "I have given him my Gesangbuch. We have been reading from it, and he means to try and get fond of it. Did you not say so, Wilfred?"

"I am not sure whether I said so—at all events, I meant so."

CHAPTER XVI.

"'Jealousy in love?'
"Not rather dead love's harsh heir—jealous pride?"
"Je tremble quand je te vois."

THE bluest of May heavens overarched Heidelberg—the brightest and warmest of May suns shone upon the fully green chestnuts, the soft-plumed larches, the dark firs, the grand old castle on the wooded hill, and the golden-brown water and gray rocks of the Neckar.

A heavy sadness weighed upon Wilfred. The voice which continually cried to him, "return, return!" was in unison with

nothing in his life, and made discord of all its music. The more sad he grew, the more kind was Mrs. Southern, the more gentle and loving Felicia.

Felicia!—he was waking to the consciousness that her name had a new significance for him. His nights now were often fevered and sleepless; and during them her image was constantly before his eyes—her name rang through his heart and brain incessantly. Felicia!—she was the embodiment of that happiness he had ever craved; she was the realization of the ideal of his day-dreams.

Felicia!—why did he fear to meet her dove-like eyes now?—what was he afraid of reading in them? Why did he often tremble in her presence—the presence of "the dear child?" Why did her watchful tenderness and reverent meekness often pain him more than the utmost anger and

contempt of which she was capable could have done? Why, when high, pure, and true thoughts rose to his lips in Saint Felicia's presence, did he hesitate to utter them? Why, if he uttered them, did he feel himself a deep-dyed hypocrite, and shrink from the praise of her true eyes? He did not dare attempt to answer these questions plainly. He resolved to leave Heidelberg, but from day to day delayed to do so: each day that might yet be spent there, with and near Felicia, was so unspeakably precious; and, in the future, what difference would the memory of a few more or less of such days make?

Eleanour's letters had been few and brief during the last six weeks: in the middle of May he received one little calculated to act as oil upon the troubled waters of his soul. It began abruptly:—

"I dare your displeasure, if I accuse

you unjustly; and I tell you plainly—I mistrust you, Wilfred!

"You have mentioned 'the Southerns,' and you spoke of them with a coldness and caution in themselves suspicious, considering that they are old friends. I have met with some one who knows the girl Felicia. It seems that she is a paragon of meek goodness and of child-like beauty. I hate her without knowing her, for I am jealous. *I* am no meek girl, but a passionate woman. I know that I can hate—oh! God, if I have to learn to hate you. The pain of jealousy is horrible torment—it hurts me through and through—it wounds my pride as well as my love.

"Come home! It is hard that I should have to say this. Week after week I have waited, expecting to hear that you were coming. Now, I say come, and end my pain. Nothing shall separate us while I

can believe that you love me. If you knew how much—and for what reasons—I want you! If you love me, come home at once!"

"The end is at hand, then!" Wilfred cried. "I will answer her letter in person—I will start to-night, and travel without stopping."

This resolution was taken at once—in feverish haste.

It was still early morning—there was plenty of time for making his few arrangements. By-and-by, he took his way to the little garden-house, saying to himself, "for the last time!" He saw Mrs. Southern and the maid in the market-place; he knew that Felicia would be waiting at home alone, in expectation of her usual lesson. He walked more and more slowly; he even altogether paused—he felt afraid to meet her.

"I alone bear the burden," he kept repeating. "She loves me; but with an innocent, child-like, painless love. She will miss me, and she will grieve for me a little; but not as I shall grieve for her—Felicia, my Felicia!"

Walk as slowly and pause as often as he might, he reached the little garden-house at last. He entered noiselessly, and, as he stood in the tiny vestibule, he could see Felicia, sitting in her accustomed place, but idle, her cheek leant upon her hand. The down-cast, musing face and the drooping form expressed—what? Dejection? And what cause for dejection could Felicia have? He remembered now how, when last night he had spoken of his near departure—not knowing, however, how near it was—she had turned her face from him quickly—as if to hide her trouble. Why should

she wish to hide her trouble—unless——

Conscious passion blazed up from the embers of smouldering love, as Wilfred gazed upon the half-averted face. He trembled, and his heart beat with suffocating violence. There she sat, still and pure, fair and frail as a white flower. Feeling that he was not fit to enter her presence—all wild-thoughted and fever-blooded as he was—he had made up his mind to retreat, when, at that very moment, Felicia turned and saw him. She started slightly, and she passed her hand across her eyes: a blush crossed her face as she rose to meet him: the troubled beating of her heart made a chain she wore—a chain of Herbert's hair—vibrate violently:—

"You startled me," she said, faintly. "You are ill to-day," she added, presently; conscious of a wild strangeness in

his eyes. "It is hot out, is it not? Do take this chair and rest—I am sure that you are ill."

He sank into the chair she placed for him; he covered his face with his hands, pressing his fingers on his throbbing temples.

"I have a rather severe headache—the light is strong," he answered, and felt as if the light of her pure presence were stronger than he could bear.

Felicia let down the green blind.

"I wish mamma were at home," she said. "You are not only ill—you are in trouble. You should not have come out feeling so ill—you should have sent for mamma to come and see you."

"Should I have left Heidelberg to-night and not first have seen you again, Felicia?" He raised his head as he spoke. "Perhaps it would have been better"—he added.

"You leave Heidelberg to-night?"

She had been standing before him—her compassionate gaze fixed upon him. Now she sat down—her heart paused in its beating.

All within and without seemed to her to turn black—to whirl round giddily—it was with difficulty that she kept her seat.

"I leave Heidelberg to-night," he said. He watched—with what even then seemed to him to be brutal stupidity and apathy—the increasing pallor of Felicia's face, the waxen whiteness of the little trembling hand that stole up to hide the trembling of her mouth.

If she had burst into tears, and if the tears had been shed on his breast with child-like abandonment, they might have sobered him; the womanly self-restraint of her bearing was as fuel to fire—teaching

him the flimsiness of the sophistry by which he had tried to convince himself that he should leave her child-hearted as he had found her—whispering to him that all caution was now vain, all self-denial too late.

There followed a very long and very painful silence. Wilfred broke it by saying :—

"Perhaps we had better not read to-day — I am hardly fit to read with you to-day. I will leave you now and come again in the afternoon to see your mother. I do not go till evening."

Quite mechanically Felicia began to arrange her books, preparatory to putting them all away.

When Wilfred rose she also rose, but asked :—

"Will you not stay till mamma comes?"

He did not answer, except by holding out

both his hands — in a moment hers were clasped in them. At their touch he seemed utterly to lose all self-command—he drew her towards him, drew her into his arms, pressed her to his heart—his hot kisses fell thick upon the smooth young cheek, the fresh young lips, the pure, pale brow, while he said :—

"I love you! You only, Felicia, and I am bound to another woman. I hold you in my arms for the first time, and the last—I may never, never trust myself to see you again! you will never desire to see me again."

She did not struggle in his hold — she let him do with her as he would—it was as if he lavished his caresses on a corpse. When he at last released her, she lifted up her pallid face and looked at him. The questioning incredulity, the mute agony of reproach, the intense desolation expressed by that look, haunted him through many

years of his life—he felt the utter loss it spoke—the loss of love, esteem, all, together. He could not bear it; he rushed from her, blinded and maddened by a swift remorse.

She had staggered from his arms to lean against the wall; she rested against it a few moments with listlessly down-hanging arms and a blank white face; then she sank gradually down upon the ground. Some pigeons she had tamed flew in at the open door; they hopped about close to her, picking up the crumbs that had been left on the floor since breakfast-time, and eyeing her askance with their sharp, bright eyes. She did not faint, for she watched them; she did not think, but four lines from the ballad of Lenore—and other like lines from other ballads which she had lately read with Wilfred—kept sounding through her brain:—

"O Mutter, Mutter! hin ist hin!
Verloren ist verloren!
Der Tod, der Tod ist mein Gewinn!
O wär' ich nie geboren!"

Beginning, by-and-by, in her bewilderment—for the whole world seemed to reel since the blow Wilfred had struck at her heart—striking at her reverence for him—to say these lines, and such as these aloud, the sound of her own voice startled her.

She rose, very feebly, and resumed her former seat, almost her former attitude. A short half-hour since and the trouble of her pure mind had been half-vague, half-sweet. Now, it was cruelly definite—all, all bitter!

She clasped her hands and lifted a look of infinite pain to the cloudless blue heavens—then she began to shiver, as if with deathly cold, and to sob.

"If I could but wake and find I had dreamed a dreadful dream!" she whispered under her breath. "If I might but go

on loving him and reverencing him! I did not want him to love me—like that." She shuddered. "Have I made an idol of him? Is this my punishment? It is very hard—heavy, bitter. Lighten it to me, O Father, or give me strength to bear it, or I die. I am young and very weak; strengthen me to bear thy chastisement, O God, or I must die!"

Resting her aching brow upon her hands, she prayed fervently for Wilfred, resignedly for herself, and grew more calm.

"My mother will come soon," she said, when she lifted up her suffering face. She went into the garden to bathe her brow and eyes with the ice-cold water of the spring; but her tears mingled with the water as she remembered how Wilfred had stood beside her when she knelt there last—how tenderly he had gazed at her—how

sweet and soothing his voice had been as he called her "my child!"

When Mrs. Southern came home she found Felicia working in the garden.

"It is too hot for you, child," she said.

"I am quite cold, mamma," Felicia answered, keeping her face averted. She added:—

"Have you seen Wilfred?"

"No—except at a distance while I was marketing. I expected to find him here."

"He has been here, but he leaves for England to-night—so he could not stay. This afternoon, I think, he will come to bid you good-bye."

That Felicia should be sorrowful Mrs. Southern found natural—and that she should strive to hide that sorrow was also natural in her.

"His departure comes suddenly at last," she said; and she went into the house,

thinking it as well to leave her daughter to herself for a little while.

Till dinner-time Felicia remained in the garden; sometimes busy, but often pausing to gaze up the wooded hill-side to the blue sky, with wistful, wondering pain in her eyes—often to look down the lovely valley, the way Wilfred would go that night, till gathering tears and the aching at her heart would warn her to set to work again.

At dinner-time her mother spoke of Wilfred. After dinner, as mother and daughter were engaged with their needles, Mrs. Southern still talked of Wilfred.

"Mother," Felicia said, presently, in a low but quite steady voice, "Do you know that Wilfred is engaged to be married? I think it must be to that Miss Narpenth of whom he has sometimes spoken."

Felicia did not look up to meet her mother's eyes.

"Has Wilfred told you this?" Mrs. Southern asked.

"Not that he is engaged to Miss Narpenth—but I think you will find that it is so, and that there was some reason why he did not tell us of it."

"It is not likely, child; he never spoke of her as if he loved her, and she is very wealthy—I know the name quite well. Wilfred, whatever his faults may be, could not do a mean thing; and to marry for money a woman he does not love would be inexpressibly mean."

Felicia said no more: she sat still and worked on, with that pain which it was martyrdom to endure gnawing at her heart. Her mother's words had sharpened the pain, though she did not allow herself to believe that Wilfred could be going to marry for money.

"He may have loved her—but, oh why

did he stay here?" she said to herself. Over and over again she told herself—"I must have had a bad dream. He cannot love me, like that, wickedly, while he is going to marry some one else."

She debated within herself whether she should avoid Wilfred if he came to see her mother, or whether she should try and behave as if indeed the interview of the morning had been but a dream. She wished to do what would pain him least; for she knew, instinctively, that, suffer as she might, he must suffer more.

While she yet debated he came, less to see her mother than to see her with a different look upon her face from the one he had left upon it that morning. Felicia sat still for some time after he entered; but, noting the profound and penitent depression betrayed by his every look and word, her heart seemed like to burst. An opportu-

nity of escape offered, and she embraced it: she ran up the garden and into the wood behind it, and stayed there till twilight fell. As she then returned to the house, her face—which had worn a wild and tortured look—was as calm and fair as the spring evening.

Wilfred was not gone; he was just going—he had been lingering in hope of receiving some sign of forgiveness to take with him.

Mrs. Southern gave him a right motherly embrace, and many kind words of farewell. He hardly felt her embrace or heard her words.

"You may give her a leave-taking kiss," the mother said, as she turned away to wipe the tears from her eyes, and Wilfred stood before Felicia.

Felicia shrank a little, but she held out her hand. Wilfred had not ventured to

offer his—his eyes questioned hers wildly.

"Can you ever forgive me?" he muttered.

"I do forgive you—I will pray for your happiness," she whispered. She gave him one earnest and gentle look, and then turned from him quickly.

When he was gone, Mrs. Southern said,

"It was strange of you to remain outdoors so long. Why did you go from the room?"

"I could not bear it any longer," Felicia answered, simply.

Throwing herself at her mother's feet, resting her head on her knees, she shed many, but not passionate tears. These tears were the first and the last that her mother saw her shed for Wilfred.

Mrs. Southern's face grew very grave; she pressed for no confidence—no explana-

tion passed between them; she guessed a little, only a very little, of what was passing in Felicia's heart. She stroked her soft hair caressingly, and spoke a few endearing words from time to time.

"God comfort and console my dear good child!" she whispered again and again.

"I am so tired, mamma! I should like to go to bed," the poor girl said, presently, and then her mother led her to her room.

Next day Felicia rose early as usual. The face that met her mother's eye was a serene face; through all the day Felicia was calm, to all appearance cheerful. This was the first of many days that, to all outward appearance, were just such days as they had spent before they had met with Wilfred.

The books she had read with Wilfred Felicia put away: she strove to put away from her life all that would most closely

remind her of him; if it had been possible, she would dutifully have put away her heart for awhile.

END OF VOL. II.

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